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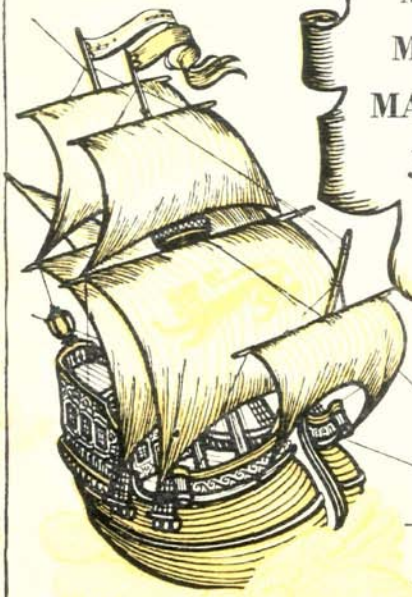

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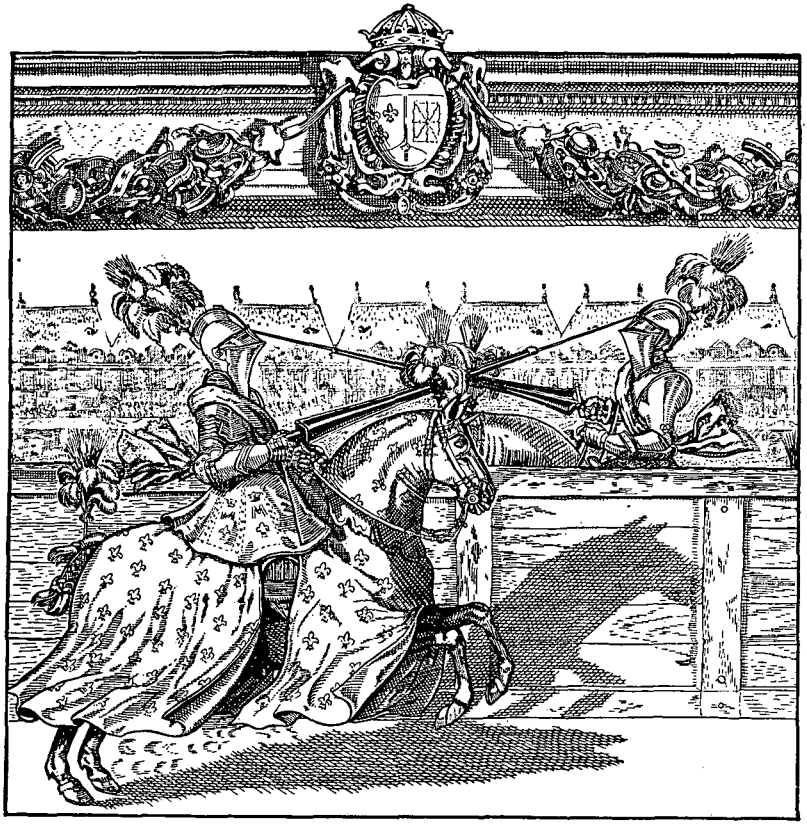

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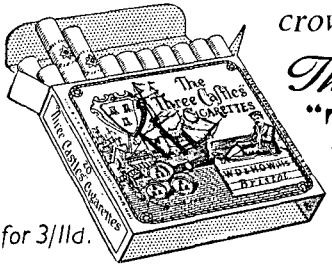

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ARGOSY

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Poppies

LIKE lips behind a veil
The poppies rest under the oats ;
Lips parting in sleep,
As though night were hot about them,
Touching the souls they speak for with sensual fires ;
These lips not petals.

But here it is summer morning,
Cool after the pride-shower ;
The smoke goes up in prayer from the village,
And the hills are monks stooping under a hood of mist.
This is surely a virgin moment.

Then what is this fantasy of the poppies?

RICHARD CHURCH

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BOATING WEATHER

If it hadn't been for the punt-pole, he would have kissed her

by MARGERY SHARP

AT the edge of the lake, beside the old boat-house, a party of six persons stood looking at the sky.

"It's going to rain," said Mrs. Romney.

"Darling!" said Mrs. Romney's niece reproachfully.

For the niece, by name Elizabeth, wanted to go on the water, and the aunt did not. Elizabeth, aged eighteen, was wearing an old tennis-skirt, an old sweater, and out-at-toes sandals. Mrs. Romney, aged thirty, had on a white piqué coat and skirt, spotlessly clean, which was as obviously a product of Bond Street as the Pekinese under her arm. The third woman, being seventy and a grandmother, was comfortably determined not to leave dry land.

"Anyway, Sir William and I will go," said Elizabeth.

But her glance—half commanding, half appealing—was not met: Sir William continued to gaze at the sky. He was uneasily conscious that both Elizabeth and Mrs. Romney were determined to get him alone, and he had no wish to be got alone. He was very fond of Elizabeth, he enjoyed flirting with Mrs. Romney; but he was perfectly aware that after an hour on the lake with either of them he might very well return to shore no longer an eligible bachelor, but an affianced man. Sir William enjoyed being eligible; he enjoyed being decorously run after by attractive women; but he knew that he was approaching the dangerous—nay, almost fatal—age of forty-one.

Mrs. Romney knew these things too. She had known Sir William for years; ruthless in affairs and among men, he was so susceptible to feminine charm that it was a constant source of wonder to her that he had so long escaped matrimony. She could attribute it only to a series of last-minute interruptions. Why, only the night before, thought Mrs. Romney, when Elizabeth appeared so suddenly from the rose-garden, had there not been a proposal trembling on his lips? She could remember his exact words, in reply to some half gallant, half wistful jesting of her own: "There ought to be someone to look after you; I wish you'd let me—" And then Elizabeth had appeared, and the moment passed.

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Probably some Elizabeth or other always did appear, just at the crucial point . . .

"If Sir William would like to go—" began old Mrs. Campbell; and she looked doubtfully round the group. These people were her guests, and it was therefore her duty to see that they enjoyed themselves; but already, after only one day, she was a little tired of them. "I'm getting old," decided Mrs. Campbell. "Week-ends are too much for me." But she pulled herself together and said brightly, "There's such a pretty view!"

"Sir William has too much sense," said Mrs. Romney, looking across at her niece. "Why don't you take Peter?"

But the second man, a youngster of twenty, also kept silence. It was a silence partly of despair, partly of desperate resolve. He was deeply in love with Mrs. Romney, who never took any notice of him, and he was planning to get her on the lake, drop her Pekinese overboard, and leap in after it. He knew exactly the right place, a fairly deep stretch of water midway between the two islands.

The sixth and last member of the party, Mrs. Campbell's grand-daughter Joanna, stood slightly aloof. She was a pre-war-looking little girl, with two fat corn-coloured pigtails and long legs. Two days earlier she had lost a model yacht, home-made, which might still be drifting or floating about. She was quite determined to go on the lake.

"Well?" said Mrs. Campbell.

Peter stepped down into the boat-house and began getting out a canoe.

"Mrs. Romney!" he appealed. "There's a view between the islands . . . simply gorgeous. I won't let you get wet."

Sir William saw his chance.

"I'll come with you and take a paddle."

"There isn't room for three," said Elizabeth.

This was so obviously true that Sir William, in the act of handing Mrs. Romney down, was forced to pause. In the meantime, Peter had seized Mrs. Romney's other hand and drawn her firmly down among the cushions; the Pekinese jumped after, and the rest of the party remained on the bank. It was at this moment that Sir William perceived the strategic value of the child Joanna.

"Then I'll take Joanna and Elizabeth in the punt," he said heartily.

Joanna said nothing, but went on untying a Rob Roy canoe. She never did speak until the last moment, but she had no intention of being hampered in her search for her model yacht by inefficient adults. She just went on untying the canoe. Elizabeth observed her, but turned a blind eye.

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"Splendid!" said Elizabeth enthusiastically.

She jumped down into the punt, followed by Sir William. Peter, heedless of Mrs. Romney's frown, dipped his paddle. The canoe slid away.

So did the Rob Roy.

"Look at that child!" cried Joanna's grandmother.

"We'll keep an eye on her," promised Elizabeth insincerely.

So now they were all five on the lake.

In the shadow of the boat-house, Joanna's grandmother sat and meditated. The fact that her seat had no back did not bother her; she had been brought up in the old school, the school which, a hundred years earlier, made the grand tour of Europe without once leaning back against the carriage cushions. She sat, an upright and tough old lady, staring out over the water; she looked as though she might be thinking about foreign missions or the first Duke of Wellington. But appearances deceive: like everyone else (except the child Joanna) old Mrs. Campbell was thinking about love.

"It was just opposite the island," thought old Mrs. Campbell.

It was just opposite the island that she had received her first proposal. The features of the young man were now dim, but she could remember distinctly every detail of her own blue-and-white fishwife dress. The underskirt was striped, the drapery plain and looped back with bows of ribbon: Mrs. Campbell could not help feeling that no girl of today had a dress as pretty as that one. And could any girl of today—so casually habituated to the company of young men—ever feel the thrill that had been old Mrs. Campbell's when *her* young man, laying aside his punt-pole, had leant gently forward and called her Maria?

"Maria, you must have guessed—"

And then her own voice, trembling under its primness:

"Mr. Coles, you have no right to call me that!"

"And may I never have the right—Maria?"

Mrs. Campbell sighed. She might have forgotten the young man's face, but every word, every tone, of that brief dialogue was still fresh in her ears. Brief indeed, for she had known at once, with her usual common sense, that he never *could* hope: he was what they called a "detrimental"—a "fascinating detrimental"—without money and without prospects. So she had very gently uttered the one word "Papa," and Mr. Coles did not persist. He was a man of experience; there was something in that gentle voice which told him quite plainly that it was no use suggesting an elopement. So he bowed his head, resumed his punt-pole, and the episode was closed.

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"It would never have done," said old Mrs. Campbell aloud. She shook her head; the shake became a nod; a moment later, Mrs. Campbell was asleep.

For a short distance, owing to the tactics of Mrs. Romney and Sir William, the punt and the canoe proceeded in company. Sir William punted well, and shot his craft briskly through the water; Mrs. Romney, by a stream of gaily called remarks, managed to link the two parties into one. She admired Sir William's dexterity, and pointed out the pleasing effect of the sunshine on Elizabeth's bare head.

Elizabeth looked at her stonily, too unskilled, and perhaps too sulky, to reply in the same vein. As for Peter, he simply paddled as hard as he knew how, in the hope of outdistancing the punt.

"Is this a race?" asked Mrs. Romney at last.

"Rather," said Sir William. "We'll race you as far as the big island."

"And then change boats," suggested Mrs. Romney, "and have a return."

"Boats and crews," amended Sir William, with a grin.

Neither Peter nor Elizabeth was amused at all, but whereas Peter merely suffered, Elizabeth took action.

"Where's that child?" she asked abruptly; and looking round they saw Joanna's canoe moving slowly but steadily in the opposite direction.

"We ought to go after her," said Elizabeth. "I've promised to keep an eye on her."

Concealing his reluctance, Sir William swung the punt in a semi-circle. Mrs. Romney called something about meeting on the other side of the island; he called cheerfully back, and then the two boats were separated by an increasing stretch of water.

But the distance between the other two craft increased also, for as soon as the punt turned, the Rob Roy began to put on speed.

The child Joanna did not want company. In the first place she was busy looking for her yacht, and in the second she quietly, but heartily disliked everyone else on the lake. The four adults, indeed, would have been surprised to know how definitely and disagreeably they were mirrored in Joanna's mind. She thought Mrs. Romney silly and affected, Sir William silly and pompous, and Elizabeth and Peter just silly.

Her knowledge of them was, of course, limited; she knew, and could have understood, nothing of Sir William's real business capacity, nor of Mrs. Romney's real genius in making two ends meet. She had to take them literally as she found them, and she found them incurably frivolous. They were always starting to do things,

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and then giving up. They were always going in to meals. They seemed incapable of remembering anything they were told. Sir William had asked three separate times whether she kept rabbits, and three separate times Joanna had answered patiently that she did not. Peter and Elizabeth talked all Saturday morning about going on a picnic; and when the time came to do something about it, they simply forgot. As for Mrs. Romney she appeared to think of nothing on earth except keeping her clothes clean.

Joanna glanced over her shoulder and saw that the punt was now concealed by a point of the island. With a sigh of relief she slackened stroke and once more began to search, slowly, methodically, and efficiently, for the missing yacht.

It was called the *Bluebell,* and had taken four months to make.

Midway between the islands Peter ceased to paddle.

"Lovely, isn't it?" he asked, waving his free hand at the view.

Mrs. Romney said nothing. She was very much annoyed. Her dress had been splashed twice already, the Pekinese was scrambling all over her white shoes, and she had lost Sir William to her chit of a niece.

"I say, you do look smashing!" observed Peter loudly.

Simply because it was easier to smile than to frown, Mrs. Romney smiled.

"But then you always do," added the infatuated young man.

Seeing that he was encouraged, Mrs. Romney took the trouble to contract her brows. At once his face fell. He stared at her piteously.

"I say—did you mind my saying that?"

"Saying what?" asked Mrs. Romney unkindly. If she had been ten years older she might have found his extreme youthfulness touching, or even adorable; but at thirty she was still too young herself, and still too attractive, to have any use for the callow. The young man bored her, and she could not be bothered to conceal it.

"That—that you always looked smashing," stammered Peter.

"Not in the least," said Mrs. Romney with composure.

For some minutes he paddled in silence, and Mrs. Romney, always philosophic, began to make the best of a bad job by mentally planning her summer wardrobe. If she went to Scotland, her tweeds would still do: there was a certain cachet about shabby but once-excellent Donegals. But suppose she went yachting? Immaculate white, of course; but it was no use pretending the new linens didn't crush, because they did. They crushed just like the old linens, and one might as well make up one's mind to it. "Wool!" thought Mrs. Romney. "There's always a breeze at sea . . ." But before she could go further, Peter began again.

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"I say—have I offended you?"

As though she had not heard, Mrs. Romney leaned back and closed her eyes. Half paralysed with despair, the young man nevertheless saw and seized his chance. The Pekinese lay unwatched. Peter put out a hand, in what he hoped was a friendly and unsuspicious gesture, and reached for the silky scruff. But Pekinese are intelligent, and as the hand descended the animal hastily backed against its mistress's ankles. Mrs. Romney at once opened her eyes and ran a hand over her stockings.

"Laddered," she said grimly.

"I'm awfully sorry," said Peter.

"And it's going to rain," added Mrs. Romney. "We'd better turn back."

They turned. It was obvious even to Peter that this was no moment for a proposal; but his chances were so rare, and his emotions so overwhelming, that he flung prudence to the winds. He cleared his throat, and the ghost of Mr. Coles prompted him.

"Celia," he mumbled, "you must have guessed—"

"Don't call me Celia," said Mrs. Romney.

The ghost of Mr. Coles prompted no more: it evidently recognized the case as hopeless.

"There," added Mrs. Romney, in a tone of exaggerated interest, "is Joanna."

She had half turned, to watch the Rob Roy coming round the island's point. Made desperate by unkindness, staking all on a last throw, Peter seized the dog by the middle and at the same time crying "Hi, Chang!" dropped it quietly overboard.

"Chang!" echoed Mrs. Romney.

"It's all right," cried Peter heroically. "I'll get him."

He stood up, prepared to leap; but it is harder than one anticipates to leap recklessly from a small canoe. The craft tipped and swayed; a teacupful of water landed in Mrs. Romney's lap. Meanwhile the Pekinese, after the first splashings of dismay, was striking out steadily for the island. But the distance, in proportion to the dog, was great; Mrs. Romney clung to the gunwale and implored Peter to hurry. She also asked why he did not use the paddle.

"Quicker to swim," muttered Peter.

Wishing with all his heart that they had taken the punt, he steadied himself in a crouching position and lifted one foot over the side. The attitude was far from heroic; it suggested rather an old gentleman getting into a bath. He redistributed his weight, and was preparing to try backwards when the lady spoke again.

"It's all right," observed Mrs. Romney suddenly. "Joanna's got him."

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Peter withdrew his foot, looked round and saw that the child Joanna had indeed spiked his guns. She was even then heaving a waterlogged bunch of fur into the Rob Roy.

"He's all right," shouted Joanna. "Shall I bring him across?"

Mrs. Romney looked at the dripping animal, and shook her head.

"No, take him back. We're going in too."

"But I'm not!" objected Joanna. "I'm looking for my yacht." And without further argument she began to paddle towards them.

"Go and meet her," ordered Mrs. Romney.

With a factitious show of haste Peter drew his blade through the water. Something warned him that any prolonged conversation with the child was highly undesirable. But if he delayed, Joanna hastened, and a moment later the canoes bobbed side by side. Joanna picked up the dog and—possibly from thoughtlessness, probably from malice—dropped it wetly into Mrs. Romney's lap. She then turned her attention to Peter.

"That's not the way to teach a dog to swim!" she said severely.

Mrs. Romney looked up.

"The *right* way," elaborated Joanna, "is to begin near the shore, so he doesn't get frightened. *Any* dog would get frightened if you threw him into the middle of a lake."

Peter nodded sulkily and began to paddle. He dared not risk an argument; all he wanted was to put as great a distance as possible between himself and this officious brat. But Mrs. Romney lifted her hand.

"Wait," said Mrs. Romney, turning back to Joanna, "do you mean to say that Chang was *thrown*?"

"Didn't you see?" asked Joanna in surprise. "Why Peter threw him!"

She then paddled away to resume her search for the yacht.

On the far side of the island Elizabeth broke a prolonged silence.

"How beautifully you punt!"

"You inspire me," said Sir William.

He did not want to say it; the words had formed and uttered themselves before he could check them. To his horror Elizabeth flushed.

"I suppose that's what you always say . . . ."

"Every time," agreed Sir William; and then instead of leaving well alone, he added. "But I don't always mean it."

For a moment she digested that in silence. Then she said slowly: "Did you want to come on the lake?"

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"Of course I did. Why?"

"Because I've thought," continued Elizabeth, with the awful directness of youth, "that you've been dodging me."

"My dear child! When?"

"All this week-end. Yesterday. You said we'd go riding, and then you forgot."

"I! It was you. You said three o'clock at the stables, and I waited a quarter of an hour."

"Three? It was four!" cried Elizabeth, almost jumping up in her agitation.

"Three," repeated Sir William firmly. "However, I'm glad to know you didn't let me down."

"I'd never let you—I mean, I never let people down," said Elizabeth.

Sir William looked at her and smiled. She was so very young, so very earnest, that he felt an almost overwhelming desire to take her ashore on the island and kiss her once or twice, and then perhaps talk to her about hockey teams. But he restrained himself. It wouldn't be fair. He was, in all probability, her first love, and she was naturally taking it seriously. So he gently swung the punt round and headed for open water.

"Aren't we going to land?" asked Elizabeth.

"Do you want to? You'd get your feet wet."

She thrust out a strong brown foot in a strong brown sandal. Her whole body was as strong as a young tree.

"You're very beautiful," said Sir William abruptly.

At once she was quite still. Not an eyelash flickered. She sat perfectly still, waiting.

"Besides," added Sir William, leaping for safety, "it's going to rain."

The stillness relaxed. Elizabeth shrugged contemptuously.

"Oh, *rain*!" she said. "I don't mind getting wet."

"But I do," said Sir William. "If I get wet I get rheumatism. You forget I'm old enough to be your father."

Elizabeth stared.

"But I am!" insisted Sir William heroically. "How old are you—eighteen? Well, I'm forty-one."

She still stared, but he could see that instead of being shocked or dismayed, the child was simply thrilled. She evidently considered forty-one to be of all ages the most romantic and admirable; and in spite of all his resolutions, Sir William felt himself weakening.

"I don't like boys," said Elizabeth.

"Not even young Peter?" asked Sir William.

Elizabeth wrinkled her nose. She seemed to be entirely without the instinct of coquetry. "What a generation it is!" thought Sir

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William; and he glanced with affectionate horror over his companion's attire.

The sandals, the skirt, the thick sweater—all were shabby to the point of dilapidation: you had to be eighteen to carry off an outfit like that! "Eighteen," thought Sir William. "A romantic age, an admirable age! Perfect health, the intelligence undulled, the senses untouched!"

And the thought crossed his mind that since he would almost certainly marry some day, he might do a damn sight worse.

It was a thought by no means unfamiliar; in the presence of any moderately attractive woman he had always an impulse to take the plunge and secure her, lest worse should befall. On the night before he had nearly proposed to Mrs. Romney; he had been practically convinced that what he needed was a woman of the world. Now, looking at Elizabeth, he wondered whether a fresh young girl—malleable, unsophisticated—would not suit him better.

"Darling!" he said, experimentally.

Her answering look was as unsophisticated as he could desire. She glowed like—like a sunbeam. And a wave of sentiment rose in Sir William's breast. That—that was the look he wanted! Not the swift, provocative glance of Mrs. Romney, not the calm, level gaze of women his own age, but a genuine outpouring of—well, of soul. "Soul!" thought Sir William; quite forgetful of the times when with equal fervour he had thought either "Intelligence!" or even "Tact!"

He looked at Elizabeth again and saw that her lips were slightly parted; if it hadn't been for the punt-pole he would have leaned forward and kissed her, and then proposed on the spot. And after all, what was a punt-pole to stand between him and happiness? For happiness he was now convinced it would be: after all these years, he had at last found what he really wanted. Sir William drew the pole in and laid it carefully along the punt.

It was just at this moment that Joanna, in the Rob Roy, completed the same action. For she, like Sir William, had found what she wanted: not a yard away, half under the surface, floated the missing craft, *Bluebell*. She shipped her paddle and reached impetuously towards it.

"Elizabeth!" murmured Sir William.

There was a shout, a splash: Joanna had tipped over her canoe and was struggling in the lake.

"Can she swim?" demanded Sir William.

"Like a duck," said Elizabeth impatiently.

But the child Joanna had on heavy shoes and a thick kilt; one arm, moreover, was clasping the yacht. She splashed like a puppy, seemed to bob under, then rose, and stretched out her free arm to

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the canoe. The canoe slipped away, she bobbed again; Sir William seized his pole and sent the punt shooting towards her.

"Get ready to catch hold!" he ordered.

In silence Elizabeth obeyed. But though the action was properly humane, her emotions were not. She did not actually wish the child to drown, but she would have taken the risk . . .

"Now!" said Sir William.

Elizabeth reached out and caught Joanna by the shoulder. Joanna looked at her ungratefully.

"Pull, don't push!" gasped Joanna. "That's not the way to save life!"

She clambered aboard, dripping but composed, and wiped the water from her face. Sir William, under the strong impression that she was about to shake herself like a dog, withdrew to the far end of the punt.

"We'd better take her in," he said cheerfully. "She ought to get dry clothes."

"Oh no," said Joanna, "I'm going back for the Rob Roy. It's my first swim this year."

"Don't be silly!" said Elizabeth sharply. "You'll never get into it."

Joanna looked her contempt. "I can get in from either end, *or* from the side. If you'd let me alone I could have got in just now. But you may as well keep the yacht."

With surprising suddenness she kicked off her shoes, discarded her kilt, and hopped casually overboard.

Just at this moment, as Mrs. Romney had prophesied, it began to rain.

Roused by the first heavy drops, old Mrs. Campbell rose stiffly to her feet and opened a large umbrella. The waters of the lake were no longer inviting, and she was pleased to see all three boats quite near to the shore. At that distance, however, and with the rain on her glasses, she could distinguish neither the condition of her grand-daughter nor the expressions of the other four. She saw only a pleasant holiday group, hastening back to shelter; a little wet, no doubt, but what was that to the young?

"Have you had a nice time?" she called cheerfully.

For a moment no one answered; then—"Splendid!" shouted Joanna.

* * *

All the things I really like to do are either immoral, illegal, or fattening.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

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MORE SPINNED AGAINST . . .

"I'm sorry about your husband," said Arachne

by JOHN WYNDHAM

ONE of the things about her husband that displeased Lydia Charters more as the years went by was the shape of him: another was his hobby. There were other displeasures, of course, but it was these in particular that rankled in her with a sense of failure.

True, he had been much the same shape when she had married him, but she had looked for improvement. She had envisaged the development, under her domestic influence, of a more handsome, suaver, better-filled type.

Yet, after nearly twelve years of her care and feeding there was scarcely any demonstrable improvement. The torso, the main man, looked a little more solid, and the scales endorsed that it was so, but, unfortunately, this seemed only to emphasize the knobbly, gangling, loosely hinged effect of the rest.

Once, in a mood of more than usual dissatisfaction, Lydia had taken a pair of his trousers and measured them carefully. Inert, and empty, they seemed all right—long in the leg, naturally, but not abnormally so, and the usual width that people wore—but, put to use, they immediately achieved the effect of being too narrow and full of knobs, just as his sleeves did.

After the failure of several ideas to soften this appearance, she had realized that she would have to put up with it. Reluctantly, she had told herself: "Well, I suppose it can't be helped. It must be just one of those things—like horsy women getting to look more like horses, I mean," and thereby managed a dig at the hobby as well.

Hobbies are convenient in the child, but irritating in the adult; which is why women are careful never to have them, but simply to be interested in this or that. It is perfectly natural for a woman—and Lydia was a comely demonstration of the art of being one—to take an interest in semi-precious and, when she can afford them, precious stones: Edward's hobby, on the other hand, was not really natural to anyone.

Lydia had known about the hobby before they were married, of course. No one could know Edward for long without being

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aware of the way his eyes hopefully roved the corners of any room he chanced to be in, or how, when he was out of doors, his attention would be suddenly snatched away from any matter in hand by the sight of a pile of dead leaves, or a piece of loose bark.

It had been annoying at times, but she had not allowed it to weigh too much with her, since it would naturally wither from neglect later. For Lydia held the not uncommon opinion that though, of course, a married man should spend a certain amount of his time assuring an income, beyond that there ought to be only one interest in his life—from which it followed that the existence of any other must be slightly insulting to his wife, since everybody knows that a hobby is really just a form of sublimation.

The withering, however, had not taken place.

Disappointing as this was in itself, it would have been a lot more tolerable if Edward's hobby had been the collection of objects of standing—say old prints, or first editions, or oriental pottery. That kind of thing could not only be displayed for envy, it had value; and the collector himself had status. But one achieved no status but that of a crank for having even a very extensive collection of spiders.

Now, over butterflies or moths, Lydia felt without actually putting the matter to the test, one could perhaps have summoned up the appearance of some enthusiasm. There was a kind of nature's-living-jewels line that one could take if they were nicely mounted. But for spiders—a lot of nasty, creepy-crawly, leggy horrors, all getting gradually more pallid in tubes of alcohol—she could find nothing to be said at all.

In the early days of their marriage Edward had tried to give her some of his own enthusiasm, and Lydia had listened as tactfully as possible to his explanations of the complicated lives, customs, and mating-habits of spiders, most of which seemed either disgusting, or very short on morals, or frequently both, and to his expatiations on the beauties of colouration and marking which her eye lacked the affection to detect.

Luckily, however, it had gradually become apparent from some of her comments and questions that Edward was not awakening the sympathetic understanding he had hoped for, and when the attempt lapsed, Lydia had been able to retreat gratefully to her former viewpoint from which all spiders were undesirable, and the dead ones only slightly less horrible than the living.

Realizing that frontal opposition to spiders would be poor tactics, she had attempted a quiet and painless weaning. It had taken her two or three years to appreciate that this was not going to work; after that, the spiders had settled down to being one of those bits of the rough that the wise take with the smooth and

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leave unmentioned except on those occasions of extreme provocation when the whole catalogue of one's dissatisfactions is reviewed.

Lydia entered Edward's spider-room about once a week, partly to tidy and dust it, and partly to enjoy detesting its inhabitants in a pleasantly masochistic fashion. This she could do on at least two levels.

There was the kind of generalized satisfaction that anyone might feel in looking along the rows of test-tubes that, at any rate, here were a whole lot of displeasing creepies that would creep no more. And then there was the more personal sense of compensation in the reflection that though they had to some extent succeeded in diverting a married man's attention from its only proper target, they had had to die to do it.

There was an astonishing number of test-tubes ranged in the racks along the walls; so many that at one time she had hopefully inquired whether there could be many more kinds of spiders. His first answer of five hundred and sixty in the British Isles had been quite encouraging, but then he had gone on to speak of twenty thousand or so different kinds in the world, not to mention the allied orders, whatever they might be, in a way that was depressing.

There were other things in the room besides the test-tubes: a shelf of reference books, a card-index, a table holding his carefully hooded microscope. There was also a long bench against one wall supporting a variety of bottles, packets of slides, boxes of new test-tubes, as well as a number of glass-topped boxes in which specimens were preserved for study alive before they went into the alcohol.

Lydia could never resist peeping into these condemned cells with a satisfaction which she would scarcely have cared to admit, or, indeed, even have felt, in the case of other creatures, but somehow with spiders it just served them right for being spiders.

As a rule there would be five or six of them in similar boxes, and it was with surprise one morning that she noticed a large bell-jar ranged neatly in the line. After she had done the rest of the dusting, curiosity took her over to the bench.

It should, of course, have been much easier to observe the occupant of the bell-jar than those of the boxes, but in fact it was not, because the inside, for fully two-thirds of its height, was obscured by web. A web so thickly woven as to hide the occupant entirely from the sides. It hung in folds, almost like a drapery, and on examining it more closely Lydia was impressed by the ingenuity of the work; it looked surprisingly like a set of Nottingham-lace curtains—though reduced greatly in scale, of course, and perhaps not quite in the top flight of design.

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Lydia went closer to look over the top edge of the web, and down upon the occupant. "Good gracious!" she said.

The spider, squatting in the centre of its web-screened circle, was quite the largest she had ever seen. She stared at it. She recalled that Edward had been in a state of some excitement the previous evening, but she had paid little attention except to tell him, as on several previous occasions, that she was much too busy to go and look at a horrible spider: she also recalled that he had been somewhat hurt about her lack of interest.

Now, seeing the spider, she could understand that: she could even understand for once how it was possible to talk of a beautifully coloured spider, for there could be no doubt at all that this specimen deserved a place in the nature's-living-jewels class.

The ground colour was a pale green with a darker stippling, which faded away towards the underside. Down the centre of the back ran a pattern of blue arrowheads, bright in the centre and merging almost into the green at the points. At either side of the abdomen were bracket-shaped squiggles of scarlet. Touches of the same scarlet showed at the joints of the green legs, and there were small markings of it, too, on the upper part of what Edward resoundingly called the cephalothorax, but which Lydia thought of as the part where the head was fastened on.

Lydia leaned closer. Strangely, the spider had not frozen into immobility in the usual spiderish manner. Its attention seemed to be wholly taken up by something held out between its front pair of legs, something that flashed as it moved. Lydia thought that the object was an aquamarine, cut and polished.

As she moved her head to make sure, her shadow fell across the bell-jar. The spider stopped twiddling the stone, and froze. Presently, a small, muffled voice said:

"Hullo! Who are you?" with a slight foreign accent.

Lydia looked round. The room was as empty as before.

"No. Here!" said the muffled voice.

She looked down again at the jar, and saw the spider pointing to itself with its number two leg on the right.

"My name," said the voice, sociably, "is Arachne. What's yours?"

"Er—Lydia," said Lydia, uncertainly.

"Oh, dear! Why?" asked the voice.

Lydia felt a trifle nettled. "What do you mean, why?" she asked.

"Well, as I recall it, Lydia was sent to hell as a punishment for doing very nasty things to her lover. I suppose you aren't given to—?"

"Certainly not," Lydia said, cutting the voice short.

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"Oh," said the voice, doubtfully. "Still, they can't have given you the name for nothing. And, mind you, I never really blamed Lydia. Lovers, in my experience, usually deserve—" Lydia lost the rest as she looked around the room again, uncertainly.

"I don't understand," she said. "I mean, is it really—?"

"Oh, it's me, all right," said the spider. And to make sure, it indicated itself again, this time with the third leg on the left.

"But—but spiders can't—"

"Of course not. Not real spiders, but I'm Arachne—I told you that."

A hazy memory stirred at the back of Lydia's mind.

"You mean *the* Arachne?" she inquired.

"Did you ever hear of another?" the voice asked, coldly.

"I mean, the one who annoyed Athene—though I can't remember just how?" said Lydia.

"Certainly. I was technically a spinster, and Athene was jealous and—"

"I should have thought it would be the other way—oh, I see, you mean you spun?"

"That's what I said. I was *the* best spinner and weaver, and when I won the all-Greece open competition and beat Athene she couldn't take it; she was so furiously jealous she turned me into a spider.

"It's very unfair to let gods and goddesses go in for competitions at all, I always say. They're spitefully bad losers, and then they go telling lies about you to justify the bad-tempered things they do in revenge. You've probably heard it differently?" the voice added, on a slightly challenging note.

"No, I think it was pretty much like that," Lydia told her, tactfully. "You must have been a spider a very long time now," she added.

"Yes, I suppose so, but you give up counting after a bit." The voice paused, then it went on: "I say, would you mind taking this glass thing off? It's stuffy in here; besides, I shouldn't have to shout."

Lydia hesitated.

"I never interfere with anything in this room. My husband gets so annoyed if I do."

"Oh, you needn't be afraid I shall run away. I'll give you my word on that, if you like."

But Lydia was still doubtful.

"You're in a pretty desperate position, you know," she said, with an involuntary glance at the alcohol bottle.

"Not really," said the voice in a tone that suggested a shrug. "I've often been caught before. Something always turns up—

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it has to. That's one of the few advantages of having a really permanent curse on you. It makes it impossible for anything really fatal to happen."

Lydia looked round. The window was shut, the door too, and the fireplace was blocked up.

"Well, perhaps for a few minutes, if you promise," she allowed.

She lifted the jar and put it down to one side. As she did so the curtains of web trailed out, and tore.

"Never mind about them. Phew! That's better," said the voice, still small, but now quite clear and distinct.

The spider did not move. It still held the aquamarine, catching the light and shining, between its front legs.

On a sudden thought, Lydia leaned down and looked at the stone more closely. She was relieved to see that it was not one of her own.

"Pretty, isn't it?" said Arachne. "Not really my colour, though. I rather kill it, I think. One of the emeralds would have been more suitable—even though they were smaller."

"Where did you get it?" Lydia asked.

"Oh, a house just near here. Next door but one, I think it was."

"Mrs. Ferris's—yes, of course, that would be one of hers."

"Possibly," agreed Arachne. "Anyway, it was in a cabinet with a lot of others, so I took it, and I was just coming through the hedge out of the garden, looking for a comfortable hole to enjoy it in when I got caught. It was the stone shining that made him see me. A funny sort of man, rather like a spider himself, if he had had more legs."

Lydia said, somewhat coldly:

"He was smarter than you were."

"H'm," said Arachne, non-committally.

She laid the stone down, and started to move about, trailing several threads from her spinnerets. Lydia drew away a little. For a moment she watched Arachne, who appeared to be engaged in a kind of doodling, then her eyes returned to the aquamarine.

"I have a little collection of stones myself. Not as good as Mrs. Ferris's, of course, but one or two nice ones amongst them," she remarked. "Oh," said Arachne, absent-minded as she worked out her pattern.

"I—I should rather like a nice aquamarine," said Lydia. "Suppose the door happened to have been left open just a little . . ."

"There!" said Arachne, with satisfaction. "Isn't that the prettiest doily you ever saw?"

She paused to admire her work.

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Lydia looked at it too. The pattern seemed to her to show a lack of subtlety, but she agreed tactfully. "It's delightful! Absolutely charming! I wish I could—I mean, I don't know how you do it."

"One has just a little talent, you know," said Arachne, with undeceiving modesty. "You were saying something?" she added.

Lydia repeated her remark.

"Not really worth my while," said Arachne. "I told you something *has* to happen, so why should I bother?"

She began to doodle again. Rapidly, though with a slightly abstracted air, she constructed another small lace mat suitable for the lower-income-bracket trade, and pondered over it for a moment. Presently she said:

"Of course, if it were to be made worth my while . . ."

"I couldn't afford very much—" began Lydia, with caution.

"Not money," said Arachne. "What on earth would I do with money? But I am a bit overdue for a holiday."

"Holiday?" Lydia repeated, blankly.

"There's a sort of alleviation clause," Arachne explained, "lots of good curses have them. It's often something like being un-cursed by a prince's kiss—you know, something so improbable that it's a real outside chance, but gets the god a reputation for not being such a Shylock after all. Mine is that I'm allowed twenty-four hours' holiday in the year—but I've scarcely ever had it." She paused, doodling an inch or two of lace edging. "You see," she added, "the difficult thing is to find someone willing to change places for twenty-four hours."

"Er—yes, I can see it would be," said Lydia, detachedly.

Arachne put out one foreleg and spun the aquamarine round so that it glittered.

"Someone willing to change places," she repeated.

"Well—er—I—er—I don't think—" Lydia tried.

"It's not at all difficult to get in and out of Mrs. Ferris's house—not when you're my size," Arachne observed.

Lydia looked at the aquamarine. It wasn't possible to stop having a mental picture of the other stones that were lying bedded on black velvet in Mrs. Ferris's cabinet.

"Suppose one got caught?" she suggested.

"One need not bother about that—except as an inconvenience. I should have to take over in twenty-four hours again, in any case," Arachne told her.

"Well—I don't know—" said Lydia, unwillingly.

Arachne spoke in a ruminative manner:

"I remember thinking how easy it would be to carry them out one by one, and hide them in a convenient hole," she said.

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Lydia was never able to recall in detail the succeeding stages of the conversation, only that, at some point where she was still intending to be tentative and hypothetical, Arachne must have thought she was more definite. Anyway, one moment she was still standing beside the bench, and the next, it seemed, she was on it, and the thing had happened.

She didn't really feel any different, either. Six eyes did not seem any more difficult to manage than two, though everything looked exceedingly large, and the opposite wall very far away. The eight legs seemed capable of managing themselves without getting tangled too.

"How do you—? Oh, I see," she said.

"Steady on," said a voice from above. "That's more than enough for a pair of curtains you've wasted there. Take it gently now. Always keep the word 'dainty' in mind. Yes, that's much better—a little finer still. That's it. You'll soon get the idea. Now all you have to do is walk over the edge and let yourself down on it."

"Er—yes," said Lydia, dubiously. The edge of the bench seemed a long way from the floor.

The figure towering above turned as if to go, and then turned back on a thought that occurred to her.

"Oh, there's just one thing," she said. "About men . . ."

"Men?" said Lydia.

"Well, male spiders. I mean, I don't want to come back and find that—"

"No, of course not," agreed Lydia. "I shall be pretty busy, I expect. And I don't—er—think I feel much interested in male spiders, as a matter of fact."

"Well, I don't know. There's this business of like calling to like."

"I think it sort of probably depends on how long you have been like," suggested Lydia.

"Good. Anyway, it's not very difficult. He'll only be about a fraction of your size, so you can easily brush him off. Or you can eat him, if you like."

"Eat him!" exclaimed Lydia. "Oh, yes, I remember my husband said something— No, I think I'll just brush him off, as you said."

"Just as you like. There's one thing about spiders, they're much better arranged to the female advantage. You don't have to go on being cumbered up with a useless male just because. You simply find a new one when you want him. It simplifies things a lot, really."

"I suppose so," said Lydia. "Still, in only twenty-four

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hours—"

"Quite," said Arachne. "Well, I'll be off. I mustn't waste my holiday. You'll find you'll be quite all right once you get the hang of it. Good-bye till tomorrow." And she went out, leaving the door slightly ajar.

Lydia practised her spinning a little more until she could be sure of keeping a fairly even thread. Then she went to the edge of the bench. After a slight hesitation she let herself over. It turned out to be quite easy, really.

Indeed, the whole thing turned out to be far easier than she had expected. She found her way to Mrs. Ferris's drawing-room, where the door of the cabinet had been carelessly left unlatched, and selected a nice fire opal. There was no difficulty in discovering a small hole on the road side of the front bank in which the booty could be deposited for collection later.

On the next trip she chose a small ruby; and the next time an excellently cut square zircon, and the operation settled down to an industrious routine, which was interrupted by nothing more than the advances of a couple of male spiders, who were easily bowled over with a flip of the front leg, and became discouraged.

By the late afternoon Lydia had accumulated quite a nice little hoard in the hole in the bank. She was in the act of adding a small topaz, and wondering whether she would make just one more trip, when a shadow fell across her. She froze quite still, looking up at a tall gangling form with knobbly joints, which really did look surprisingly spidery from that angle.

"Well, I'm damned," said Edward's voice, speaking to itself. "Another of them! Two in two days. Most extraordinary."

Then, before Lydia could make up her mind what to do, a sudden darkness descended over her, and presently she found herself being joggled along in a box.

A few minutes later she was under the bell-jar that she had lifted off Arachne, with Edward bending over her, looking partly annoyed at finding that his specimen had escaped, and partly elated that he had recaptured it.

After that, there didn't seem to be much to do but doodle a few lace curtains for privacy, in the way Arachne had. It was a consoling thought that the stones were safely hidden away, and that any time after the next twelve or thirteen hours she would be able to collect them at her leisure . . .

No one came near the spider-room during the evening. Lydia could distinguish various domestic sounds taking place in more or less their usual succession, and culminating in two pairs of footfalls ascending the stairs. And but for physical handicaps, she might

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have frowned slightly at this point. The ethics of the situation were somewhat obscure. Was Arachne really entitled . . . ? Oh well, there was nothing one could do about it, anyway.

Presently the sound of movement ceased, and the house settled down for the night.

She had half-expected that Edward would look in to assure himself of her safety before he went to work in the morning. She remembered that he had done so in the case of other and far less spectacular spiders, and she was a trifle piqued that, when at last the door did open, it was simply to admit Arachne.

She noticed, also, that Arachne had not succeeded in doing her hair with just that touch that suited Lydia's face.

Arachne gave a little yawn, and came across to the bench.

"Hullo," she said, lifting the jar, "had an interesting time?"

"Not this part of it," Lydia said. "Yesterday was very satisfactory, though. I hope you enjoyed your holiday?"

"Yes," said Arachne. "Yes, I had a nice time—though it did somehow seem less of a change than I'd hoped." She looked at the watch on her wrist. "Well, time's nearly up. If I don't get back, I'll have that Athene on my tail. You ready?"

"Certainly," said Lydia, feeling more than ready.

"Well, here we are again," said Arachne's small voice. She stretched her legs in pairs, starting at the front, and working astern. She doodled a capital A in a debased Gothic script to assure herself that her spinning faculties were unimpaired. "You know," she said, "habit is a curious thing. I'm not sure now I'm not more comfortable like this, after all. Less inhibited, really."

She scuttered over to the side of the bench and let herself down, looking like a ball of brilliant feathers sinking to the floor. As she reached it, she unfolded her legs, and ran across to the open door. On the threshold she paused. "Well, good-bye, and thanks a lot," she said. "I'm sorry about your husband. I'm afraid I rather forgot myself for the moment."

Then she scooted away down the passage as if she were a ball of coloured wools blowing along in the draught.

"Good-bye," said Lydia, by no means sorry to see her go.

The intention of Arachne's parting remark was lost on her: in fact, she forgot it altogether until she discovered the collection of extraordinarily knobbly bones that someone had recently put in the dustbin.

* * *

What can't be cured must be insured.

OLIVER HERFORD

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CORONATION TREE

Expectant faces were turned to him, offering no way out

by MARGARET BONHAM

GIOVANNI woke on the morning of Coronation Day and for a moment he could not think why he felt good. Then he remembered. He stretched and turned his head to look out of the window, without sitting up. The window, under a beetling eyebrow of thatch, was nearly level with the floor, and to sit up was unnecessary; it could also be painful for the roof sloped steeply over the bed, but that was a hazard he was used to avoiding.

Through the small panes he saw the field silver with dew above the apple trees, tilting up to a sky too young in daylight to be blue, no more than the colour of skim milk, but cloudless.

Beside him his wife Gwen still slept, with careful curlers in her hair that normally was spread all over the pillow. Beyond her, in a wicker cradle on a box, one starfish hand sprawled affectedly on its chest, the baby slept too, and beyond it again from the little cupboard of a room next door there was no sound from John's cot. Giovanni reached an arm down to the floor and turned off the tin alarm clock before it could ring. He slid out of bed and took his clothes down to the kitchen to dress, so as not to disturb them. They would all have a long day.

He drank some milk and cut himself a slice of bread; later he would come home for breakfast, when he had finished with the cows. Giovanni was so used to cows it did not occur to him to resent their obsession with routine, their demands for attention, Coronation or no Coronation, Sundays, Bank holidays, Christmas and all-the-year-round. He took it for granted that even this day of all days should begin in the byre.

Still chewing, he got on his bicycle and swung off down the lane, under the hawthorn trees, between the banks where pink campion and dying bluebells were anchored by strings of spider-web pearls to the thick green grass. A thrush sang, a blackbird exploded from the hedge close to his front wheel; cocking a transparent ear, rose-veined and silk-fringed, a young rabbit examined his approach and hopped without haste into its burrow. Giovanni swallowed the last of the bread and raised his voice in song. When he reached

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the farm and leaned his cycle against the cow-shed wall he was still singing. His untrained tenor was richly Italian, but the song he sang was *Roll out the Barrel.*

Liscombe Farm was next to the Vicarage, and Giovanni's voice floated over the brick wall and the laurels and up the Gloire de Dijon rose to an open bedroom window, and woke the Vicar.

The Vicar had trained his subconscious to resist Giovanni's early-morning serenades, and usually he succeeded in sleeping through them, but today his subconscious let him down, and as soon as he woke he knew why. He lay staring at the ceiling, which was a long way above him and slightly flaking from the damp—all the Vicarage rooms were high and cold—and began wondering all over again, as if it were not weeks too late to remedy matters, whether he had done the right thing.

The Vicar's wife, like Giovanni's, went on sleeping, and the Vicar interrogated the ceiling in silence and without moving, for she too would have a long day ahead. But in any case her side of the organisation, he thought, had nothing to worry about. Women were reliable in these matters; she had no reason to lie awake. But as for me, the Vicar said to himself, as for me, should I have given in to them?

He shut his eyes, sighing, and saw himself for the hundredth time unfolding that little screw of paper, the cause of all the trouble, that Mrs. Peel had just drawn and handed to him out of his own hat. It was from that point that he had gone over and over the situation, and he still could not make up his mind.

The first few meetings of the Coronation Committee had been progressive and amiable. They had planned the tea, the sports, the social, elected a Ladies' Sub-committee for the catering, organised the collection of sixpence a week from each family for expenses, all with no more acrimony than one would expect.

Even when Colonel Ferrers proposed the ceremonial planting of a tree on the green, it had gone down quite well. There had been a long horticultural argument about planting out of season, and another about what sort of tree, but neither had become really impassioned, and finally the idea had been seconded and unanimously passed. It was not until the meeting in late April, to decide on details, that any trouble had arisen.

The trouble came up over the choice of who was to do the ritual planting. The first suggestion was that everyone should have a go, but this was turned down as likely to lead to confusion and the tree's being buried under a mountain of earth.

The Lord of the Manor had a seat in the Abbey, and would not be present. The Vicar refused because of annoying the chapel

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members, the Colonel because of his lumbago, and all the possible claimants put forward by members of the committee were greeted by the dissentient voices of other members. The only thing they agreed on, even Mrs. Peel, was that planting a tree properly was a job for a man. It was then that the Vicar had his regrettable idea.

"Perhaps, Mr. Chairman," he said, "I might be allowed to put forward a suggestion. At home I have a complete list of the parish, which gives every male over the age of twenty-one. I propose these names should be written on slips of paper—if the Committee wishes I will have them written out myself—and at our next meeting one name should be drawn out of a hat to decide who has the honour of representing us. I will even provide the hat." Polite laughter. "I am sure you will agree this is the only perfectly fair way of coming to a decision."

The committee thought it over, raised a few perfunctory objections on principle, and gave in. They arranged to meet again in a fortnight's time.

The evening before the next meeting the Vicar's son, Gerald, who was twelve and convalescing at home after appendicitis, was permitted to write the names of fifty-six adult males on strips of foolscap paper, fold and screw up each one, and put them in a paper bag to be taken along to the hall. There they were tipped into the Vicar's hat and left ready on the stained deal table while the rest of the business was gone through, the planting ceremony decided on, other details arranged. The Colonel then scrupulously held up the hat so that Mrs. Peel could not see which piece she was taking, and Mrs. Peel stretched up an arm sleeved in brown tweed and picked out a paper and handed it to the Vicar.

No premonition shadowed the Vicar's mind, only passing hope that it would not be Fred Harvey, who drank and beat his wife, or old Everett, who was eighty-nine and arthritic. He untwisted the paper, and as soon as he saw the first three letters his heart sank to the bottom of his clerical waistcoat; he knew what was going to happen. Expectant faces were turned to him, offering no way out. He read aloud, "Giovanni Castellonghi."

There was a stunned silence. At last Harry Timms had said under his breath, "He'm a foreigner."

Ruthlessly analysing himself while he studied the ceiling from his bed, the Vicar wondered what the course of events would have been if anyone else had spoken first. He and Harry Timms had always got across each other; the most Christian forbearance on the Vicar's part had not always succeeded in making him turn the other cheek. He could never stifle a feeling that Timms was bigoted, Timms openly accused the Vicar of Popish practices. If it had been

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the Colonel, or Mrs. Peel, or Evans, would he have answered as he did? It was idle speculation. What had happened was that he had said, "I think we all agreed, Mr. Timms, that the name of every man in the village should be put down."

"Still, it's *our* Coronation," said Mr. Timms, at once up in arms.

The Vicar saw some justice in this remark, but could not bring himself to applaud it. He said feebly, "What is the view of the meeting?"

Mrs. Peel had had a scene with Mr. Timms in December, when she had accused his dog of killing two of her cockerels. She said, "Giovanni's been here getting on for ten years now. Seems to me he's one of us. He married a local girl and he's got two children."

"That's right," said someone, but doubtfully. The Committee all thought of Giovanni's children, so English in name, so lusciously Mediterranean in appearance. "Still," said Mr. Timms, not giving way an inch, "'tisn't as if he was nationalised."

"Come, come," said the Vicar, "you know as well as I do, Mr. Timms, Giovanni has applied for naturalisation." The purist in him was stronger than the advocate; fortified by a week in Florence two years ago, he still gave Giovanni's name its pure Italian values, while everyone else called it Jevanny. "We must not," he added, "be prejudiced. After all, for that matter, one might say Huw Evans here was a foreigner."

"So he be, too," said Mr. Timms stubbornly, "but the Welsh was on our side, and the Eyeties wasn't."

"That's right," someone said again. Mr. Evans, whose brother Iorweth in Ystradyglais was an impassioned and militant Welsh Nationalist, looked a shade relieved.

The Colonel cleared his throat. Heads were turned towards him, and after a startled pause he said, "Should have thought of this before. We agreed to draw for names." He was strict about committee procedure.

"Still," said Mr. Timms, "foreigners planting our trees. Our Coronation. Seems funny, like."

"That's right."

They argued on. The Vicar and the Colonel stood up for principles; Mrs. Peel stood up for Giovanni. The battle was finally won, but less, they felt, through conversion to their point of view than because of the near approach of closing-time, an hour insignificant to the Vicar and the Colonel but of deep importance to the opposition. Mr. Timms and his satellites retired muttering among themselves—anyone could see that within two days the village would be split into two camps. Full of misgiving, but with a faintly glowing sense of having stood up for the rights of man, the Vicar made his way through the nettles back to the Vicarage.

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The next day he told Giovanni, calling him from the byre to lean over the farm gate in the warm sun. It took a little time to explain, while Giovanni listened intently, screwing up his face; he fully understood the local dialect, his own accent was a mixture of that and Italian, but the Vicar's Oxford English often defeated him. However, comprehension dawned at last.

"You want me to planta tree?"

"Your name was chosen," said the Vicar. "Out of my hat," he added, to make sure Giovanni had grasped the method.

Giovanni was enthralled. He leaped on his bicycle and sailed off, singing like a lark, to tell his wife.

The Vicar rarely called at the Seven Stars, but he liked and respected Fred Highfield, the landlord, and about a week later he dropped in during the morning when the bar was empty and sounded Fred on what the village had been saying. "What attitude are they taking up? Are they very much against it?"

"Some is," said Fred, drawing a pint. "Some isn't. Harry Timms, now, he's dead agin it, and Bert Lovitt, that lost his brother in Italy, and two or three others, but I wouldn't say as most on 'em felt so strongly. I reckon most of 'em just feels it ought to be a local chap's job, planting Coronation trees. Nobody's got a bad word for Giovanni, mind you, not even Harry and Bert. It's only the principle, like."

"Yes, indeed," said the Vicar, sighing. It was from the principle he had expected trouble all along; as a person, Giovanni had achieved a remarkable popularity, and had achieved it with almost every possible circumstance against him. Germans were bad enough in the eyes of the village, but they were grudgingly admitted to be clean and hardworking; Eyeties, on the other hand, as everyone knew, were dirty, lazy, murderously tempered, and not to be trusted within a mile of any woman under seventy-five. Giovanni, arriving as a prisoner of war, was regarded from the start with violent suspicion by everyone except the village girls, among whom his golden eyes and black curls played havoc.

However it was soon realised, with general astonishment and some incredulity, that he was not that sort at all. Liscombe had never had a better cowman—he worked incessantly, efficiently, and cheerfully; he saved his wages, lived in the farmhouse in a state of perfect cleanliness, sat in with the children while the Liscombes went to whist drives, and eventually, after casting a distant and dispassionate eye over all the local girls, selected Gwen and courted her in a serious and purposeful manner, asking permission of her parents, and marrying her very properly and traditionally in the parish church.

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Liscombe gave them a cottage, which Giovanni repaired and decorated and surrounded by a small brilliant garden, and there in due course they produced two children at decent intervals and appeared idyllically happy. Giovanni adored his children. He looked after them, fed them and potted them and sang them to sleep, when his wife went across in the evening to see her parents. He was never seen in the pub. No other woman ever got so much as a meaning glance from his eyes. The village marvelled, but gave in.

What with Giovanni's austerely domestic life, therefore, the arguments about his being chosen for the tree-planting did not reach him, or if they did they passed over his head. His wife heard them, but said nothing to him. From Giovanni's innocent delight in his honour anyone would think he had been elected Mayor. On his next Saturday afternoon off he cycled eight miles into the town, singing, and bought a new tie, red and purple stripes, with a crown and E.R. in the middle, and a purple rayon handkerchief for the breast pocket of his Sunday suit.

He groomed the cows till they looked like polished mahogany, and over each door of the cow-sheds he nailed a little Union Jack. He seemed to feel that far from having been fortuitously drawn out of the Vicar's hat he had been personally chosen by the village as its representative, a gesture of respect and acceptance, giving him at last his full status as a British citizen.

In the last week or two before the Day his voice, always powerful, took on an even more uninhibited exuberance—floating over the wall and the laurels, penetrating every corner of the Vicarage, it made the Vicar so far forget the exigencies of his cloth and his position as Giovanni's supporter as to snap irritably at his wife that he wished to high heaven Giovanni would sometimes turn his attention at least to the Home Service, if not the Third, rather than the Light.

His wife said placatingly, " He's trying so hard to be English."

" What he sings," said the Vicar, " is not English. It's debased American."

" I don't suppose he knows the difference."

The Vicar sighed, stuffed his ears with cotton wool and went off to write a sermon on Christian charity.

When Coronation Day dawned and he was woken by *Just One of Those Things*, he lay chilled with apprehension. Last night, returning across the green at dusk after a final check on trestles and chairs for the tea, urns in the hall, tapes and ropes for the sports and a hundred other details, he had passed the open window of the Seven Stars and heard a voice identifiable as that of Harry Timms

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uplifted in lurid execration of foreigners, an answering buzz of chorus that sounded like approval. Still, the public bar was one thing, the Day another; surely, he thought, they would not make a scene on the Day. He lay there worrying till Giovanni, with a final burst of song, was heard driving the cows into the meadow and out of earshot.

Giovanni cycled home and ate a large breakfast, holding the baby on his knee. Afterwards he went into the garden and picked some red, white and blue flowers, made them into a garland with fuse-wire, and pinned them round the hood of the pram, with a bunch on each side of the handle too.

After that he heated water in the copper, and got out the tin bath and bathed himself and shaved lingeringly and carefully in the scullery. The ceremony was to be at noon. He had been coached by the Vicar, and as he scrubbed he went through his part, lips moving anxiously.

Upstairs Gwen dressed the children, in white touched with red and blue; John shouted for his flag, and his voice, thought Giovanni with pride, sounded exactly like the voice of any other village child. He got out of the bath and dried himself, and put on his Sunday suit, the new tie, the purple handkerchief, shoes polished like horse-chestnuts, and a quantity of perfumed haircream. For his buttonhole he had saved a tiny rosette of red, white and blue flowers. He looked in the cracked greenish glass over the sink. He was ready.

By the time Gwen and Giovanni arrived on the green with their children, the pram, their flowers and flags, most of the village was assembled; Giovanni had timed his entrance like Royalty.

The sun shone, bunting flapped in the trees, the Seven Stars was decorated with Union Jacks and red butter-muslin and E.R. in gilded and painted three-ply, and beside a flagpole with a Royal Standard lent by the Colonel and a silver ceremonial spade lent by the Lord of the Manor was a neat hole for the tree. The tree itself, which was about as tall as Giovanni and contained in a large tub so that it should not suffer from its change of place, stood beside a deal table. The Vicar had an air of anguished benevolence.

Mr. Timms and Bert Lovitt, lips compressed, stood ominously in the front rank of the ring of spectators.

Giovanni selected a place of honour for his wife and children, and stepped up to the Vicar. He beamed delightedly round the circle, and the circle gazed back at him stolidly, like an assembly of farmers inspecting a rather flashy horse at a market. In his dark suit, with his flowers and tie and handkerchief, his hair shining like boot polish, he looked extraordinarily and exotically foreign.

His olive skin was already tanned to an utterly different colour

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from the red-brown local sunburn; his teeth, miraculous as an advertisement, flashed in alien white. He stood there with the ingenuous panache of a trained seal, sleekily controlled, eager to perform.

Bert Lovitt growled menacingly. The Vicar cast an imploring upward glance at the sky. The church clock struck midday.

At this moment there was a stir among the outer ranks of spectators, heads were turned, and an enormous strange car was seen gliding to a standstill on the edge of the green. In colour it was an iridescent baby blue, and glittered with chromium gadgets; after a moment's hesitation its gleaming doors opened simultaneously and two people got out.

They revealed themselves to the village stare as a couple in early middle age, partridge-plump, with a look of centrally-heated indoors. The man wore a pale grey suit that had clearly cost at least twice as much as the Colonel's and probably eight times as much as anyone else's present, café-au-lait suede shoes, and what the Colonel recognised with instant disbelief as a Guards tie. The woman was lapped in pale blue crêpe, with diamond bracelets over black gloves and a hat of black feathers over a sleek fair head.

She wore her clothes with great elegance and, in an urban setting, she could have carried them off. Even here, out of place as she looked, she did not seem to feel it. Her embracing gaze swept the spectators, the bunting in the trees, the emblems, the duck-pond and the thatched stone cottages, in a way that made even inanimate objects appear self-consciously picturesque. She said audibly to her husband, in the petrified silence, "How *perfectly* charming!"

The villagers shifted feet. The Colonel cleared his throat and, as if it had been the signal he was waiting for, the Vicar gathered himself together and said, "Shall we start?" He glanced at the ring of faces as expressionless as Stonehenge, and twitched the skirt of his cassock, in which Popish garment he had to Mr. Timms's final disgust seen fit to array himself. His eyes came to rest on Giovanni, who alone of the spectators seemed unmoved to hostility by the invasion—if anything, with two spectacular additions to his audience, he appeared even more elated than before.

Like an athlete waiting for the pistol, he raised himself slightly on his toes; his teeth flashed in the sunlight, he looked round with an air of theatrical efficiency at the tree in its tub, peered into the hole that was to receive it, to see that it was properly manured and ready. His whole demeanour could hardly have been more likely to annoy if it had been calculated to a hair.

The Colonel muttered, "Let's get going."

The ceremony did not take long. During it, the two strangers

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edged their way confidently to the front rank, as if this place were their due, coming to rest beside Mr. Timms. They watched with deep interest, like explorers investigating the ritual of a native tribe. At the end, when Giovanni had showily filled in the hole and firmed the earth with athletic flourishes, there was a silence ; no one quite knew what to do, obstinacy kept Mr. Timms from leading any formal clapping. In the pause the woman turned to him and said, " Quite delightful ! "

Mr. Timms grunted.

" And who is he ? " she said, waving a black glove at Giovanni. The village listened, but Mr. Timms's reply was inaudible.

" No, *really* ? " she said. " Italian ? You mean you let a foreigner—but how too extraordinary ! Do you hear that, James ? Imagine—an Italian ! "

Leaning on the silver spade, haloed with achievement, Giovanni heard. He seemed quite dumbfounded—deflating visibly, he looked round the crowd with the anguished bewilderment of a dog that has been kicked instead of patted for performing. The Vicar glanced at the Colonel and took a step forward, but before he could intervene Mr. Timms had set himself in charge. The village watched, while he swelled and assumed one of his Looks.

"Jevanny," said Mr. Timms in majestic reproval, " bain't no foreigner. He lives in these parts. He's one of us, like.

" Foreigners," he said, crescendo, contempt and enmity so suffusing his face that the Vicar feared for his blood pressure, " is people that comes from outside and sticks their noses in other people's business." With that he turned his back on them, walked up to Giovanni with Bert Lovitt at his heels, clapped him on the shoulder, and said, " Nice piece of planting, son."

As if this were what it had been waiting for, the audience broke up. Giovanni was surrounded by the elders, the disapprovers, shaking him by the hand and congratulating him—if there were a touch of ostentation in their manner, he was too Latin in his love of an occasion to notice it. He glowed with proud complacency. The tide engulfed him, moving over the green, leaving beached in solitude the two strangers to whom he owed his glory.

" Oh well," the man said as they turned and went back to the car. " You get odd types in these out-of-the-way places."

" Very odd," she said, " and very rude. But it was interesting, wasn't it ? Just fancy, an Italian prisoner. A *dago*."

They drove off.

* * *

Landscape painting is the obvious resource of misanthropy.

WILLIAM HAZLITT

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FLOWER OF LOVE

There is a garden in her face
Where roses and white lillies glow

THOMAS CAMPION

I met her in the greenest dells,
Where dewdrops pearl the wood bluebells ;
The lost breeze kissed her bright blue eye,
The bee kissed and went singing by,
A sunbeam found a passage there,
A gold chain round her neck so fair ;
As secret as the wild bee's song
She lay there all the summer long.

JOHN CLARE, 1793—1864

Lords and Ladies

In the graceful bend of every tree, even in the "Lords and Ladies," clumped in the scoops of the hedgerow, and most of all in the soft primrose, wrung by the wind, but stealing back, and smiling when the wrath was past—in all of these, and many others, there was aching ecstasy, delicious pang of Lorna.

R. D. BLACKMORE, *Lorna Doone*

Damask Rose

Lady, when I behold the roses sprouting,
Which clad in damask mantles deck the arbours
And then behold your lips where sweet love harbours
My eyes present me with a double doubting.
For viewing both alike, hardly my mind supposes
Whether the roses be your lips or your lips the roses.

JOHN WILBYE, *Madrigal*

Floriferous Corner

"Let's sit down on one of those seats over there past that notice-board," said Miriam, "where we can see those blue flowers."

They did as she suggested, and sat down in a corner where a triangular bed of stock and delphinium brightened the asphalted traceries of the recreation ground.

"I wonder what they call those flowers," she said. "I always liked them. They're handsome."

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"Delphicums and larkspurs," said Mr. Polly. "They used to be in the park at Port Burdock."

"Floriferous corner," he added approvingly.

He put an arm over the back of the seat and assumed a more comfortable attitude. He glanced at Miriam, who was sitting in a lax, thoughtful pose, with her eyes on the flowers. She was wearing her old dress. She had not had time to change, and the blue tones of her old dress brought out a certain warmth in her skin, and her pose exaggerated whatever was feminine in her rather lean and insufficient body, and rounded her flat chest delusively. A little line of light lay across her profile. The afternoon was full of transfiguring sunshine, children were playing noisily in the adjacent sand-pit, some Judas trees were abloom in the villa gardens that bordered the recreation ground, and all the place was bright with touches of young summer colour. It all merged with the effect of Miriam in Mr. Polly's mind.

Her thought found speech. "One did ought to be happy in a shop," she said, with a note of unusual softness in her voice.

It seemed to him that she was right. One did ought to be happy in a shop. Folly not to banish dreams that made one ache of townless woods and bracken tangles and red-haired linen-clad figures sitting in dappled sunshine upon grey and crumbling walls and looking queenly down on one with clear blue eyes. Cruel and foolish dreams they were, that ended in one's being made a mock of. There was no mockery here.

"A shop's such a respectable thing to be," said Miriam thoughtfully.

"I could be happy in a shop," he said.

His sense of effect had made him pause.

"If I had the right company," he added.

She became very still.

H. G. WELLS, *The History of Mr. Polly*

Rondeau

White as a lily, redder than a rose,
Bright as a ruby from the Orient,
I stare and stare while your rare beauty glows
White as a lily, redder than a rose ;
So overcome, that I keep watch with those
Who serve for ever by love's precedent :
White as a lily, redder than a rose ;
Bright as a ruby from the Orient.

GUILLAUME DE MACHAULT, *c.* 1300—1377,
translated by R. N. CURREY

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Immortal Flower

He turned his back to the compound, holding the girl in front of him. From the house the light fell with distant softness on her face, and the light in the dispensary, cast upward into the orange frame of the door below the dark cave of palm, softly and deeply on her black hair. He bent down and kissed her with unhurried tenderness. As she moved her head, the rose-pink flower woven into the scroll of her hair fell away, as he always expected it would, and he caught it with his hands . . .

"Your flower," he said. He held it for her to take from his hands. The stem was milky and he could smell the fragrance of the clustered blossom.

"Thank you," she said.

"What flower is this?" he said. "I wanted to ask you."

"The frangipani. The Life tree. In Burmese Ta-yop-sagah."

"It is very beautiful."

"It is the flower of immortality," she said. "Because it can live on and on. Without soil or water. For ever."

"Now who is being superstitious?"

"Oh! No," she said. "Everything is immortal really. We are all immortal if we want to be."

She put back the flower into the side of her hair and he smelt the drenching scent of it against his face.

"You will see," she said. "It will be there when you come again. This blossom will fade and then another will open."

"I shall look for it," he said.

H. E. BATES, *The Purple Plain*

Golden Day

Lying among the yellow flowers
On the green hill,
Glowing in the brilliant and increasing
And quivering heat of the day,
Was my lover's golden and gracious body.

And I, hesitating in our happiness
To pick two daisies to adorn her hair,
Hearing her cry, too late turned back to see
The gorgeous dragon-fly
That lighted on her smooth and sun-hot knee.

KENNETH HOPKINS, *Love and Elizabeth*

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LAW-ABIDING

He was filled with a sense of waking nightmare

by MARC BRANDEL

IT was raining again: the drops slapping against the window of the compartment. At times it seemed to Hallam that it was always raining in Europe. Thinking of Germany, for instance, where he had spent the greater part of the last three years working in collaboration with Army Intelligence, he remembered the cold rain dripping from the eaves of the ruined buildings, the spattering pools among the rubble. And now the driving wetness of England.

The train was beginning to slow for East Croydon. He glanced warily across at the only other occupant of the narrow English compartment. But the wariness was really no more than automatic now. He wasn't afraid that Radjek would leave the train at Croydon, would try and give him the slip or even contact anyone.

He knew only too well what Radjek was going to do. He was going to sit there just as he was, his large head settled back against the embroidered antimacassar provided by the railway for its first-class passengers, his heavy lids closed, the infrequent, restive shifting of his square, reddish hands on his knees the only indication he was so much as aware of Hallam, that he was even awake.

He was going to sit there until they got into Newhaven Harbour at nine tonight, and then he was going to take his bag from the rack and move slowly and ponderously ahead of Hallam down the station platform, through the customs sheds, and up the gangplank of the Channel boat to safety—carrying the figures he had been sent to England to get securely packed away inside his mind beyond any possibility of detection or recapture.

And there was absolutely nothing Hallam could do to stop him.

Disgustedly he turned back to his own window, looking out over the twilit acres of identical red roofs, the row of somehow pathetically cared-for gardens running down to the base of the railway embankment. A woman in a flowered apron stood in the shelter of a doorway, holding a child on her arm. Her hand clasping the child's wrist fluttered its arm up and down, waving at the train.

Hallam raised his own hand in response and then let it fall back beside him. For a moment he hated Radjek with a quite personal hatred.

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" It must be such a lonely job," his sister back in Rhode Island had once said to Hallam. But he had never seen it that way. He loved his job—not for the occasional risks involved; he had, as a matter of fact, little stomach for that side of it: at forty-two it was a conscious effort of will for him to be even moderately courageous—but for the very reason that it gave him such a sense of belonging.

In working against a man like Radjek he could feel he was working *for* so many people. People like that woman: decent, friendly, standing in the doorways of their ugly little houses waving their goodwill at passing strangers.

He wondered again if Radjek knew just how safe he was. And was bitterly forced once more to admit to himself that he almost certainly did. It had been a last doomed hope, this: to show his own hand, to follow Radjek quite openly since last night, follow him to the station, into this empty compartment. A last hope of scaring Radjek into thinking they weren't going to let him leave the country.

But Radjek hadn't seemed in the least perturbed, had scarcely even looked up when Hallam entered the compartment. And he must certainly know by now who Hallam was, that he was being followed, must surely have suspected it ever since he landed in England. To Radjek's kind it would seem unthinkable that a foreigner, any foreigner, shouldn't be kept under constant watch.

And yet, Hallam thought more hopefully, Radjek *had* taken this train, this slow, halting local, instead of the more obvious Channel-boat express. Radjek still couldn't quite believe, apparently, that it could be this easy: that even a suspect foreigner might have the *right* to move freely in a " corrupt democracy," in England.

But then Radjek hadn't been at the Yard yesterday when Hallam talked to MacDonald. Good old Mac, with his worn, homely face and worried eyes, his fuzzy hair and moustache. Like a little grey panda, Hallam had thought, sitting across the desk from him in the small office. There was nothing disrespectful in the thought: it was a habit he had trained himself to, to settle on some simple association of this kind for each new face he encountered. It helped to fix it in his memory.

" We've checked with our Passport Control people." Mac pulled a sheet of paper towards him. " Everything in order, I'm afraid. ' Naturalized Czech citizen. Visitor's visa issued by the British Consul in Prague.' Our fault, that. ' Travelling as the representative of the Continian Aluminum Company.' A bona fide firm with legitimate business connections in this country."

Hallam nodded. " You've got to hand it to them. They know exactly how to take advantage of every legality they can."

" So there it is." Mac slid the report back into the folder on

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his desk. "If he wants to leave the country I don't see how we can stop him. I mean we can't go round breaking our own laws, can we? We can search his luggage, of course. Might even stretch a point and make a search of his . . . person. Though we don't like to do that if we can help it."

"Wouldn't do any good, anyway." Stretch a point, Hallam thought. And if the positions were reversed? Radjek's kind wouldn't consider it stretching a point to commit murder in broad daylight.

"He hasn't a thing on him," he continued. "Not a scrap of paper or a note of any kind. It's all in his head. That's why they sent Radjek. Because Radjek would understand what those figures meant. He wouldn't even have to memorize them exactly—only their meaning."

"I see." Mac pulled a rough-textured black pipe from his pocket and began to fill it. "Just how important are they?" he asked, after a moment. "Not precisely a close secret, would you say? Anyone doing the same experiments could get the figures for themselves."

"Sure. Sure, they could. Only it took your boys twenty-eight months and they had the best equipment in the world. Twenty-eight months that we're just handing them on a platter the moment Radjek leaves the country tomorrow."

Hallam stood up, his own self-disgust suddenly overwhelming. "Right in front of me," he said. "Right there on a public bench in the bang middle of Hyde Park with me sitting within twenty feet of them. Can you imagine! All the time I'd kept thinking Radjek would have to go to Harwell himself, or they would have to smuggle copies of the figures out to him. It never even occurred to me, pinhead that I am, that that was how they would do it, that was how they had planned it all along. Word of mouth.

"I hadn't even seen that was *why* they sent Radjek. A scientist. Far too important a man for them to risk unless they were absolutely sure of what they were doing. And that whole hour. That whole hour they were sitting there, Radjek and Hart, I didn't suspect a damn thing. Me! I didn't even know who Hart was."

"Not your fault, that." If there had been any sympathy in Mac's voice Hallam couldn't have borne it, but it was a mere statement of fact. "We didn't know about Hart ourselves until just before his death."

He shook out the match he had been holding to his pipe. "Extraordinary, a fellow like that, isn't it?" he went on. "Hart, I mean. Oxford man. Senior science scholar. Brilliant record. Went all through the war. Comes of a good family too. You can imagine what this has done to them.

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" His sister was in here this afternoon. Awfully nice girl, got a special citation for her work during the blitz, night ferry service up and down the river. She just sat there, fidgeting with the clasp of her handbag, saying, ' Isn't there anything I can do to make up for my brother ? ' "

Mac reached gloomily for another match. " Beats me," he admitted. " Men like Hart. What makes 'em do it, do you think ? Not money. Kind of a disease, I suppose."

Hallam turned back to his chair and sat down. " Why did Hart kill himself ? " he asked. " Did he know you were after him ? "

" No." There was a look of sadness in Mac's honest, worried eyes that might almost have been taken for pity. " No, we can be pretty sure he didn't.

" Do you know what I think ? " he continued. " It was because of them. Radjek's lot, I mean. They didn't trust him. I don't mean to say they killed him. It was suicide all right. But they were through with him. They let him see they didn't trust him any longer. And after all he'd done for them, the realization was just too much for him. He had betrayed his own country, his family, everything he had been brought up to believe in, and suddenly he had nothing left, nowhere to turn."

" Look." In his urgency Hallam leaned forward and rested his hands on Mac's desk. " Suppose I was willing to swear, go to court and swear Radjek was in touch with Hart. Wouldn't that be enough for you—at least to detain him ? "

" Could you swear what they talked about ? "

" No." Hallam shook his head. " No, I guess, for all I can prove, they talked about the weather. But we both know they didn't."

" That's not enough, though, is it ? "

Hallam did not answer, and after a moment Mac asked frankly : " Look here, what's your particular interest in Radjek ? Is there anything you people can prove against him ? "

" Not legally." Hallam felt for a cigarette and lit it. " We think—hell, we know—he's the co-ordinator of a group of agents working in the States. That's why I was sent here after him. We knew he was after those figures, and we hoped we could get something on him here. Something that would stick in your courts."

His own anger with himself crept into his voice again. " And now that he's got the figures on top of everything else, we can't even stop him leaving the country."

" Well, after all, old chap." There was a strange, rather likeable embarrassment in MacDonald's grey eyes. " I mean that's rather what it's all about, isn't it ? Can't go around arresting people on

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suspicion or we should none of us sleep safe in our beds at night. What ? "

" I guess so." These English, Hallam thought. He'll be offering me a cup of tea next.

But he felt a great affection for Mac at that moment. " It's too bad it doesn't work both ways, though," he said. " Too bad a man like Radjek can come over here and take advantage of your decency, your regard for laws he despises you for having."

" Do you suppose he knows ? " There was a sudden sharpness in MacDonald's voice, a look of bright speculation in his eyes. " I mean do you suppose Radjek himself knows just how safe he is, that we can't touch him without breaking our own laws ? They have funny ideas about other countries sometimes, you know, these people."

Sure he knew, Hallam thought now, watching Radjek across the narrow aisle of the compartment. His taking this train, this local that stopped at Newhaven Town as well as the Harbour, was no more than an irrational reflex of caution in order to leave himself a last way out in case he was stopped and questioned.

The train jolted to a stop, a shower of raindrops shaking loose from its roof, splashing on the platform. A wave of passengers rippled forward from the shelter of a wooden awning, disclosing a row of railway posters.

The door of the compartment was opened from the outside : a girl entered in a flurry of parting advice. She settled her suitcase on the seat opposite Hallam and turned back to a tall woman on the platform, opening the window and leaning out.

" Have a good time."

" Oh, I shall. Don't worry. I expect I shall make an absolute pig of myself."

" Do. You deserve it, and dear . . ."

" Two eggs every morning. Just fancy ! I wish you were coming too. It's too awful to think of your having to stay in England. I wish . . ."

" Don't, dear. Just try and forget it all. Forget *him*. Stay as long as you can and have a simply lovely time."

There was a warning whistle, a moment's silence as the brake-pumps stilled, the slamming of doors up and down the train. The girl stepped back and closed the window, pulling on the heavy leather strap until the single pane slipped into place and held.

The older woman's face moved slowly past. Looking out, Hallam saw her turn back to the shelter of the awning. There had been two men in raincoats standing beneath it, and in the instant

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before they were lost to sight Hallam had the impression that they had been waiting for her there.

The thought caused him a slight uneasiness, like a word in a cipher that did not quite fit. Why had only the woman come to the door of the compartment?

He watched the girl as she moved briskly about, straightening her suitcase on the seat beside her, folding her coat on top of it, settling into her corner. She was rather pretty in an English way, the softness of her eyes and mouth oddly contrasting with the bones of her face, the firmness of her chin, the long, capable hands.

So many English people were like that, he thought; all shy apology on the surface and underneath as tough and serviceable as the shoes they make, with that curious indignant toughness that came from their assurance of always being in the right.

The girl had scarcely even glanced at either him or Radjek. Having made herself comfortable, she opened a book, a green cloth-bound book with no wrapper. As she raised it Hallam noticed the red, circulating library label.

He was aware again of that faint sense of disquiet, as at something that did not quite fit. "Stay as long as you can," the woman on the platform had said. Then wasn't it a little strange to be taking a library book with her?

His attention was distracted by a movement in the corridor outside. A man passed, glancing briefly in. Hallam had the impression of a white, pointed face beneath an absurdly narrow-brimmed, high-crowned, black hat. Like an irritable gnome, he thought. His glance shifted to Radjek. The other had not moved, but sat looking at his hands.

Hallam felt an instant's stirring of excitement. The thumb and forefinger of Radjek's right hand were rubbing softly, insistently together. It was a mannerism Hallam had noticed before; it reminded him of a gambler fingering his last chip; and he had come to recognize it as a sign of anxiety.

What was it that had disturbed Radjek? The girl's presence in the compartment? He brought his eyes back to her.

Perhaps it was only the contrast between his hatred of Radjek and his instinctive liking for her, or perhaps something in the girl herself, her air of gentle independence, of hidden reserves; but for a moment, looking at her, Hallam was aware of almost suffocating anger.

It was girls like this who had stood beside the ack-ack guns in 1940, who had run the little boats up and down the Thames on those too bright London nights. Who were now being edged a little closer to a still greater ordeal, an even worse hell, because of his own stupidity and failure.

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The train was beginning to slow again. Haywards Heath. The quiet little country station, peaceful as an old print, seemed only to echo his own self-accusations. Only one stop more now, he thought, Lewes, and then Newhaven, first the Town, and a mile further on the Harbour, and the waiting boat.

A figure passed the window, glancing in, moving on down the corridor. Hallam caught a glimpse of the little white face beneath the absurd black hat. The irritable gnome again.

He looked at Radjek. His hands were moving once more, the fingers whispering nervously together. He *was* afraid of something, Hallam decided. But what? What on earth had he got to be scared of? All he had to do was walk aboard.

Opposite him the girl closed her book, laying it beside her. There was a thin white celluloid marker, slipped between the pages towards the end, but she had not moved it. Had she finished the book already?

He looked at her face. She was staring out of the window, thoughtfully watching the green Sussex fields, the neat hedges, the still trees slip by, but Hallam had the impression of a certain tenseness in her manner now. Like Radjek, she might have been nerving herself to something.

Before he could recover from his surprise, a signal box slid past the window. Lewes. The train slowed, shuddered, halted, the air-brakes panting. Doors slammed shut. There was the sound of men's voices in the corridor; the train was on its way again.

The girl seemed to drag her eyes from the window and straightened a little in her seat, staring directly ahead of her.

The voices were approaching their carriage. Two men came into view and halted. At the sight of them Hallam felt a surge of hope. There was no mistaking that air of deferential firmness, of somehow apologetic authority. The two Yard men wore their profession like coats as they stepped into the compartment and stood just inside the door, taking in the three passengers.

"Anyone for the Channel boat?" It was the elder of the two who had spoken.

Hallam frowned, puzzled. Then: of course, he thought, his brief hope dying. Money. They have to check your money. You're only allowed to take out so much.

"Yes, I am." The girl snapped open her bag and pulled out her passport. "I'm going to Paris."

The Yard man took it from her, opening it at the first page, reading her name. His eyes hardened unaccountably. "And just what are you going to be doing in France?" he asked.

"Taking a holiday."

"That all?"

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Hallam was incredulous: he had felt a note of menace in the question.

"Plenty of nice places in England for a holiday." The Yard man gestured brusquely towards the suitcase on the seat beside the girl. "This yours?" Without waiting for an answer he bent down and unfastened the locks. "Or don't you like England?" he asked, fingering expertly through the neatly piled clothes inside.

Hallam looked at the girl's face. Within this framework of the English carriage with its old-fashioned upholstery, its fading photographs of Bognor Regis, and the Lake District, the expression in her eyes filled him with a sense of waking nightmare.

He had seen that same expression in other eyes before; but then it had seemed to him a mere extension of their surroundings: the barrier, the arc-lights, the booted guards, the little huddle of refugees from the Eastern Zone presenting their papers with that same look of fearful hope.

"Yes, of course I like it. Why shouldn't I?" Snap. Lock. Snap. Lock. Her voice matched the brittle, staccato sound of her fingers blindly opening and closing the clasp of her handbag.

"What's this?" The Yard man picked up the book from the seat beside her and read out the title and author's name. "Russian, isn't he?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"Afraid we'll have to ask you to come along with us." He had closed the suitcase and now handed it and the book to his companion in the doorway. "Come on, Miss."

"But what for? What am I charged with?"

The trembling of the girl's lips was pitiful.

"Not charged with anything . . . *yet*. Just taking you into protective custody." There was a nasty, jeering quality in the Yard man's voice. "Just on suspicion, you might say."

"Suspicion of what?" Snap. Lock. Snap. Lock. She was fighting hard to control it, but she was plainly terrified now.

Hallam watched her with a kind of sickened fascination, as one might watch a gruesome scene in a Grand Guignol show, a scene that bore absolutely no relation to reality. The worn, homely compartment, the quiet English countryside sliding serenely past outside had ceased to exist for him, transformed into grotesque fantasy by the incredibility of what was happening in relation to it.

"You're known to have associated with the traitor, Jonathan Hart."

"But I hardly knew him . . ."

"Come along, now. Come along." The Yard man made a quick, impatient movement towards the door. "Halpert," he called, "take her outside."

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Still protesting, but with an air of terrified resignation now, the girl stood up, her fingers struggling awkwardly with the buttons of her coat, and followed the younger Yard man out into the corridor.

The other stood for a moment looking after her and then slipped her passport into his pocket. There was a dreadful finality in the gesture: he might have been turning a key in a lock.

"Anyone else for the boat?" He turned suddenly on Radjek. "You leaving the country?"

There was no change of expression on Radjek's heavy face, only the reddish hands moved now with increasing restive speed. He did not answer at once, but his eyes reflected no sign of hesitation, or even of thought. It was simply a moment lost; Radjek might merely have been waiting for the moment to pass before replying.

"No," he said in his flat, dryly factual voice. "I'm only going as far as the town. On business. I'm returning to London to-morrow."

The words rang in Hallam's ears like a reprieve. Bewildered as he had been by what had just taken place, shocked beyond words by the Yard man's treatment of that girl, by the fact that such things could happen here, in England, he was conscious now only of a sense of quite physical relief.

Radjek had committed himself. He wouldn't dare now to try and go aboard that boat—at least tonight. It was only slowly that the full implications of this fact became clear to Hallam. For the moment it was enough to realize that he had been given a second chance, a second chance to meet the harsh demands of his own New England conscience, to do his job, to stop those figures in Radjek's mind leaving the country at all, ever.

"May I see your ticket, please?"

The large hand stilled on the heavy knee, fumbled with a button, searched an inside pocket.

"This ticket is for Newhaven Harbour." The detective turned the small green pasteboard card in his fingers.

"A mistake." For all the interest in Radjek's voice he might have been correcting an error in grammar. "They misunderstood me at the booking-office."

"We'll be coming into the town in a few minutes now." There was an unmistakable note of warning in the Yard man's voice. He handed the ticket back and without a glance at Hallam turned and left the compartment, sliding the door shut behind him.

Hallam was alone with Radjek once more. His mind was working desperately, trying to fit things together. MacDonald. What he had said about Hart. The Yard man's incredible treatment of that girl. "Just on suspicion, you might say. You're known to have associated with Hart."

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Had some confederate of Hart's come forward then, implicated a whole new group? If so, why hadn't they arrested Radjek? At least warned him directly not to try and leave the country? None of it seemed to fit.

They were beginning to slow for Newhaven Town. Feverishly Hallam searched his mind for some fact, some detail he might have overlooked that, like the key-word in a cipher, would make the whole thing clear. And then all at once he had it. The library book!

Hallam did not actually smile, but his relief, his sense of impersonal victory and above all his admiration for MacDonald, to say nothing of that girl, were so great at that moment that if he had been alone he would have laughed aloud.

It was a quietly respectable hotel on a side street about a quarter of a mile from the station. Above the double glass door a flaking gilt sign announced The Traveller's Arms and below it in smaller letters, "Licensed to sell Wines and Spirits."

Hallam waited outside until he had seen Radjek follow the ageing porter in his green baize apron up the stairs and out of sight, and then crossed to the desk himself and asked for a room. The grey-haired woman on duty pushed the book towards him, and Hallam signed his name. On the line above in Radjek's brisk, awkward hand was the entry, "Konrad Bergen, Sweden," and the room number, 119.

Radjek must be even more scared than he had imagined, Hallam thought with a flush of triumph, to have reverted, so futilely, to a false name.

"Do you have a phone?" Hallam asked. He had an idea Mac might not be very far away, might be waiting at the local police station for this very call, in fact.

"It's right down the hall, sir."

Hallam thanked her, making his way past the cheerful murmur of the public bar to the box at the end of the corridor. "Lift receiver and insert three pennies . . . When your correspondent answers press Button A."

Good old England, Hallam thought. Its own special way of doing everything: to the English the only, the right way. And yet what a good, just way it often was—like Mac's way of stopping Radjek. He pressed Button A.

"Hullo, Mac," he said a moment later. "Yes, it worked. You did it. That girl was wonderful . . . Oh, is that who she is? Well, she's certainly made up for her brother now. She did a marvellous job. Sure, she fooled me. I was all ready for a moment there to denounce England as a totalitarian state. Yes, he's taken a

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room at The Traveller's Arms in West Street. I'm downstairs. All right, I'll wait for you. About five minutes. Fine." He hung up and, whistling happily under his breath, strolled back into the lobby.

"Do you want to see your room now, sir?"

"No, thank you." Hallam smiled at the woman out of sheer high spirits. "I'm waiting for a friend." He walked over to a chair from which he could watch both the door and the stairs and lit a cigarette.

He was less than halfway through it when he first noticed the shoes. They were small, very shiny, very pointed, black shoes, and they were standing on the top step in sight of where he was sitting, the landing above cutting them off from the rest of the figure. For perhaps half a minute they remained quite still, and then, slowly and with a kind of conscious deliberation, they began to descend the stairs.

The legs of a pair of narrow blue serge trousers came into view, a dark, belted raincoat, a sharp little white face, and finally a narrow-brimmed, absurdly high-crowned, black hat. It was the irritable gnome from the train.

Without hesitation, but with the same conscious deliberation, the little man continued down step by step until he reached the lobby. Like a hunter, Hallam thought, moving through the forest, afraid of snapping a twig. Like a gambler fingering his last chip.

In an instant Hallam was out of his chair.

The gnome turned and started back up the stairs at his approach, his livid hand moving in a curiously graceful arc towards his pocket. But Hallam was too quick for him. He felt the delicate bones of the other's wrist like something not quite living in his hands, as he wrenched the gnome's arm up behind his back. Then his other hand slid into the little man's pocket.

It was a gun he had expected, but instead his fingers wounded themselves on a blade, and withdrawing them Hallam found them reddened and viscid with more than his own blood.

He was aware of the gnome's feeble struggles: aware of them in a sickened, impalpable way that somehow recalled to him the doomed struggles of a dead chicken. His mind fled from them up the stairs into room 119, already knowing what he would find there. It had always been difficult for him to accept violence, even more to practise it.

He brought his hand round, grasping the gnome's thin shoulder with some idea of forcing him before him up the stairs, into Radjek's room. And became conscious all at once of the lobby beneath them, the raised faces, the suddenly disturbed expressions of the guests.

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And then the glass door to the street swung open, and in a moment Mac was beside him on the stairs. With his quiet, matter-of-fact presence, order seemed to reinvade the scene at once.

"Come, come now. Don't want to cause a disturbance." There was something absurd and yet wholly admirable in the way the helmeted bobby took the gnome from Hallam's hands, leading him with quiet certainty towards the door.

"What room?"

"119." Hallam bounded up the stairs ahead of Mac. In front of him a long corridor stretched towards a window. At its end, to the right, a door bore the number in brass.

Radjek lay face down across the bed. Except for the wide gashes in the dark cloth of his coat where the gnome's knife had ripped through to the heart, he might have been sleeping.

They didn't trust him either! Hallam thought with a kind of dazed wonder. They sent the gnome after him to make sure he got on that boat. But then Radjek made his one mistake.

The words Mac had spoken the day before came to his mind: "They have funny ideas about other countries sometimes, these people." In spite of everything, Radjek had never quite been able to believe that any law could protect *him*.

When Mac had had his men stage that scene in the compartment with the help of Hart's sister, Radjek had been only too ready to accept it as real. And so for a moment he had been afraid. "No, I'm only going as far as the town. I'm returning to London tomorrow."

And after that he had been afraid even to try to leave, thinking those same two Yard men would surely be watching the boat . . . While all the time he had had nothing, nothing in the whole world, to fear—except from his own people. . . .

Hallam's thoughts broke off, interrupted by a sound beside him.

Mac was standing quite still, staring at the man on the bed, his lips moving in what seemed at first to be a string of indistinguishable curses. Gradually Hallam made out the other's words.

"Oh, damn them," the little Scotsman was muttering to himself. "Damn them. Why do they have to try it here? I don't care if they murder each other in their own country until there's not one of them left. But damn them, I won't *stand* for it here. Here amongst decent, law-abiding people."

* * *

The English instinctively admire any man who has no talent and is modest about it.

JAMES AGATE

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★ SCIENCE FICTION CHOICE

NOTHING TO REPORT

The thing made him cry out in wild horror

by PAUL ERNST

THE shining ball of the full Earth floated like a smooth pearl between two vast, angular mountains. The full Earth. Another month had ticked by.

Clow Hartigan turned from the port-hole beside the small air lock to the Bliss radio transmitter.

"RC3, RC3, RC3," he droned out.

There was no answer. Stacey, up in New York, always took his time about answering the RC3 signal, confound it! But then, why shouldn't he? There was never anything to report from Station RC3. Nothing of any significance ever happened on the Moon.

Hartigan stared unseeingly at the pink cover of a six-months-old *Radio Gazette*, pasted to the wall over the control board. A pulchritudinous brunette stared archly back at him over a plump shoulder that was only one of many large nude areas.

"RC3, RC3—"

Ah, there Stacey was, the pompous little busybody.

"Hartigan talking. Monthly report."

"Go ahead, Hartigan."

A hurried, fussy voice. Calls of real import waited for Stacey; calls from Venus and Jupiter and Mars. Hurry up, Moon, and report that nothing has happened, as usual.

Hartigan proceeded to do so.

"Lunar conditions the same. No ships have put in, or have reported themselves as being in distress. The hangar is in good shape, with no leaks. Nothing out of the way has occurred."

"Right," said Stacey pompously. "Supplies?"

"You might send up a blonde," said Hartigan.

"Be serious. Need anything?"

"No." Hartigan's eyes brooded. "How's everything in little old New York?"

Stacey's businesslike voice was a reproof.

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"Sorry. Can't gossip. Things pretty busy around here."

The burr of power went dead. Hartigan cursed with monotony, and got up.

Clow Hartigan was a big young man, with reddish hair and slightly bitter blue eyes. He was representative of the type Spaceways sent to such isolated, emergency landing-stations as the Moon.

There were half a dozen such emergency landing-domes, visited only by supply ships, exporting nothing, but ready in case some passenger liner was crippled by a meteor or by mechanical trouble. The two worst on the Spaceways list were the insulated hell on Mercury, and this great, lonely hangar on the Moon. To them Spaceways sent the pick of their probation executives. Big men. Powerful men. Young men. (Also men who were unlucky enough not to have an old family friend or an uncle on the board of directors who could swing a soft berth for them.) Spaceways did not keep them there long. Men killed themselves, or went mad and began inconsiderately smashing expensive equipment, after too long a dose of such loneliness as that of the Moon.

Hartigan went back to the port-hole beside the small air lock. As he went, he talked to himself, as men do when they have been too long away from their own kind.

"I wish I'd brought a dog up here, or a cat. I wish there'd be an attempted raid. Anything at all. If only something would *happen*."

Resentfully he stared out at the photographic, black-and-white lunar landscape, lighted coldly by the full Earth. From that his eye went to the deep black of the heavens. Then his heart gave a jump. There was a faint light up there where no light was supposed to be.

He hurried to the telescope and studied it. A space liner, and a big one! Out of its course, no matter where it was bound, or it couldn't have been seen from the Moon with the naked eye. Was it limping in here to the emergency landing for repairs?

"I don't wish them any bad luck," muttered Hartigan, "but I hope they've burned out a rocket tube."

Soon his heart sank, however. The liner soared over the landing-dome a hundred miles up, and went serenely on its way. In a short time, its light faded in distance. Probably it was one of the luxurious around-the-solar-system ships, passing close to the Moon to give the sightseers an intimate glimpse of it, but not stopping because there was absolutely nothing of interest there.

"Nothing *ever* happens in this God-forsaken hole," Hartigan gritted.

Impatiently he took his space suit down from the rack. Impatiently he stepped into the bulky, flexible metal thing and clamped

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down the head-piece. Nothing else to do. He'd take a walk. The red beam of the radio control board would summon him back to the hangar if for any reason anyone tried to raise RC3.

He let himself out through the double wall of the small air lock and set out with easy, fifteen-foot strides toward a nearby cliff on the brink of which it was sometimes his habit to sit and think nasty thoughts of the men who ran Spaceways and maintained places like RC3.

Between the hangar and the cliff was a wide expanse of grey lava ash, a sort of small lake of the stuff, feathery fine. Hartigan did not know how deep it might be. He did know that a man could probably sink down in it so far that he would never be able to burrow out again.

He turned to skirt the lava ash, but paused a moment before proceeding.

Behind him loomed the enormous half-globe of the hangar, like a phosphorescent mushroom in the blackness. One section of the half-globe was flattened; and here were the gigantic inner and outer ports where a liner's rocket-propelled life shells could enter the dome. The great doors of this, the main air lock, reared halfway to the top of the hangar, and weighed several hundred tons apiece.

Before him was the face of the Moon: sharp angles of rock; jagged, tremendous mountains; sheer, deep craters; all picked out in black and white from the reflected light of Earth.

A desolate prospect . . . Hartigan started on.

The ash beside him suddenly seemed to explode, soundlessly but with great violence. It spouted up like a geyser to a distance of a hundred feet, hung for an instant over him in a spreading cloud, then quickly began to settle.

A meteor! Must have been a fair-sized one to have made such a splash in the volcanic dust.

"Near thing," muttered Hartigan, voice sepulchral in his helmet. "A little closer and they'd be sending a new man to the lunar emergency dome."

But he only grimaced and went on. Meteors were like the lightning back on Earth. Either they hit you or they missed. There was no warning till after they struck; then it was too late to do anything about it.

Hartigan stumbled over something in the cloud of ash that was sifting down around him. Looking down, he saw a smooth, round object, black-hot, about as big as his head.

"The meteor," he observed. "Must have hit a slanting surface at the bottom of the ash heap and ricocheted up and out here. I wonder—"

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He stooped clumsily towards it. His right " hand," which was a heavy pincer arrangement terminating the right sleeve of his suit, went out, then his left, and with some difficulty he picked the thing up. Now and then a meteor held splashes of precious metals. Sometimes one was picked up that yielded several hundred dollars' worth of platinum or iridium. A little occasional bonus with which the emergency-landing exiles could buy amusement when they got back home.

Through the annoying shower of ash he could see dimly the light of the hangar. He started back, to get out of his suit and analyse the meteor for possible value.

It was the oddest-looking thing he had ever seen come out of the heavens. In the first place, its shape was remarkable. It was perfectly round, instead of being irregular as were most meteors.

" Like an old-fashioned cannon ball," Hartigan mused, bending over it on a work-bench. " Or an egg—"

Eyebrows raised whimsically, he played with the idea.

" Jupiter ! What an egg it would be ! A hundred and twenty pounds if it's an ounce, and it smacked the Moon like a bullet without even cracking ! I wouldn't want it poached for breakfast."

The next thing to catch his attention was the projectile's odd colour, or, rather, the odd way in which the colour seemed to be changing. It had been dull, black-hot, when Hartigan brought it in. It was now a dark green and was getting lighter swiftly as it cooled !

The big clock struck a mellow note. Time for the dome-keeper to make his daily inspection of the main doors.

Reluctantly Hartigan left the odd meteor, which was now as green as grass and actually seemed to be growing transparent, and walked towards the big air lock.

He switched on the radio power unit. There was no power plant of any kind in the hangar ; all power was broadcast by the Spaceways central station. He reached for the contact switch which poured the invisible Niagara of power into the motors that moved the ponderous doors.

Cr-r-rack !

Like a cannon shot the sound split the air in the huge metal dome, echoing from wall to wall, to die at last in a muffled rumbling.

White-faced, Hartigan was running long before the echoes died away. He ran towards the work-bench he had recently quitted. The sound seemed to have come from near there. His thought was that the hangar had been crashed by a meteor larger than its cunningly braced beams, tough metal sheath, and artful angles of deflection would stand.

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That would mean death, for the air supply in the dome would race out through a fissure almost before he could don his space suit.

However, his anxious eyes, scanning the vaulted roof, could find no crumpled bracing or ominous downward bulges. And he could hear no thin whine of air surging in the hangar to the almost non-existent pressure outside.

Then he glanced at the work-bench and uttered an exclamation. The meteor he had left there was gone.

"It must have rolled off the bench," he told himself. "But if it's on the floor, why can't I see it?"

He froze into movelessness. Had that been a sound behind him? A sound, here, where no sound could possibly be made save by himself?

He whirled—and saw nothing. Nothing whatever, save the familiar expanse of smooth rock floor lighted with the cold white illumination broadcast on the power band.

He turned back to the work-bench where the meteor had been, and began feeling over it with his hands, disbelieving the evidence of his eyes.

Another exclamation burst from his lips as his fingers touched something hard and smooth and round. The meteor. Broken into two halves, but still here. Only, *now it was invisible!*

"This," said Hartigan, beginning to sweat a little, "is the craziest thing I ever heard of!"

He picked up one of the two invisible halves and held it close before his eyes. He could not see it at all, though it was solid to the touch. Moreover, he seemed able to see through it, for nothing on the other side was blotted out.

Fear increased within him as his fingers told him that the two halves were empty, hollow. Heavy as the ball had been, it consisted of nothing but a shell about two inches thick. Unless—

"Unless something really did crawl out of it when it split apart."

But that, of course, was ridiculous.

"It's just an ordinary metallic chunk," he told himself, "that split open with a loud bang when it cooled, due to contraction. The only thing unusual about it is its invisibility. That *is* strange."

He groped on the work-bench for the other half of the thick round shell. With a half in each hand, he started towards the stock room, meaning to lock up this odd substance very carefully. He suspected he had something beyond price here. If he could go back to Earth with a substance that could produce invisibility, he could become one of the richest men in the universe.

He presented a curious picture as he walked over the brilliantly lighted floor. His shoulders sloped down with the weight of the two pieces of meteor. His bare arms rippled and knotted with

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muscular effort. Yet his hands seemed empty. So far as the eye could tell, he was carrying nothing whatever.

"What—"

He dropped the halves of the shell with a ringing clang, and began leaping towards the big doors. That time he *knew* he had heard a sound, a sound like scurrying steps! It had come from near the big doors.

When he got there, however, he could hear nothing. For a time the normal stillness, the ghastly, phenomenal stillness, was preserved. Then, from near the spot he had just vacated, he heard another noise. This time it was a gulping, voracious noise accompanied by a sound that was like that of a rock-crusher or a concrete-mixer in action.

On the run, he returned, seeing nothing all this while; nothing but smooth rock floor and plain, metal-ribbed walls, and occasional racks of instruments.

He got to the spot where he had dropped the parts of the meteor. The parts were no longer there. This time it was more than a question of invisibility. They had disappeared actually as well as visually.

To make sure, Hartigan got down on hands and knees and searched every inch of a large circle. There was no trace of the thick shell.

"Either something brand-new to the known solar system is going on here," Hartigan declared, "or I'm getting as crazy as they insisted poor Stuyvesant was."

Increased perspiration glinted on his forehead. The fear of madness in the lonelier emergency fields was a very real fear. United Spaceways had been petitioned more than once to send two men instead of one to manage each outlying field; but Spaceways was an efficient corporation with no desire to pay two men where one could handle the job.

Again Hartigan could hear nothing at all. And in swift though unadmitted fear that perhaps the whole business existed only in his own brain, he sought refuge in routine. He returned to his task of testing the big doors, which was important even though dreary in its daily repetition. The radio power unit was on, as he had left it. He closed the circuit.

Smoothly the enormous inner doors swung open on their broad tracks, to reveal the equally enormous outer portals. Hartigan stepped into the big air lock, and closed the inner doors. He shivered a little. It was near freezing out here in spite of the efficiency of the heating units.

There was a small control room in the lock, to save an operator

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the trouble of always getting into a space suit when the doors were opened. Hartigan entered this and pushed home the switch that moved the outer doors.

Smoothly, perfectly, their tremendous bulk opened outwards. They always worked smoothly, perfectly. No doubt they always would. Nevertheless, rules said test them regularly. And it was best to live up to the rules. With characteristic trustfulness, Spaceways had recording dials in the home station that showed by power markings whether or not their planetary employees were doing what they were supposed to do.

Hartigan reversed the switch. The doors began to close. They got to the halfway mark; to the three-quarters—

Hartigan felt rather than heard the sharp, grinding jar. He felt rather than heard the high, shrill scream, a rasping shriek, almost above the limit of audibility, that was something to make a man's blood run cold.

Still, without faltering, the doors moved inward and their serrated edges met. Whatever one of them had ground across had not been large enough to shake it.

"Jupiter!" Hartigan breathed, once more inside the huge dome with both doors closed.

He sat down to try to think the thing out.

"A smooth, round meteor falls. It looks like an egg, though it seems to be of metallic rock. As it cools, it gets lighter in colour, till finally it disappears. With a loud bang, it bursts apart, and afterwards I hear a sound like scurrying feet. I drop the pieces of shell to go towards the sound, and then I hear another sound, as if something were masticating and gulping down the pieces of shell, eating them.

"I come back and can't find the pieces. I go on with my test of opening and closing the main doors. As the outer door closes, I hear a crunching noise as if a rock were being pulverized, and a high scream like that of an animal in pain. All this would indicate that the meteor *was* a shell, and that some living thing *did* come out of it.

"But that is impossible.

"No form of life could live through the crash with which that thing struck the Moon, even though the lava ash did cushion the fall to some extent. No form of life could stand the heat of the meteor's fall and impact. No form of life could eat the rocky, metallic shell. It's utterly impossible.

"Or—*is* it impossible?"

He gnawed at his knuckles and thought of Stuyvesant.

Stuyvesant had been assigned to the emergency dome on

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Mercury. There was a place for you! An inferno! By miracles of insulation and supercooling systems the hangar there had been made liveable. But the finest of space suits could not keep a man from frying to death outside. Nothing to do except stay cooped up inside the hangar, and pray for the six-monthly relief to come.

Stuyvesant had done that. And from Stuyvesant had begun to come queer reports. He thought he had seen something moving on Mercury near his landing-field. Something like a rock!

Moving rocks! With the third report of that kind, the corporation had brought him home and turned him over to the board of science for examination. Poor Stuyvesant had barely escaped the lunatic asylum. He had been let out of Spaceways, of course. The corporation scrapped men suspected of being defective as quickly as they scrapped suspect material.

"When a man begins to see rocks moving, it's time to fire him," was the unofficial verdict.

The board of science had coldly said the same thing; though in more dignified language.

"No form of life as we know it could possibly exist in the high temperature and desert condition of Mercury. Therefore, in our judgment, Benjamin Stuyvesant suffered from hallucination when he reported some rock-like entity moving near Emergency Hangar RC10."

Hartigan glanced uneasily towards the work-bench on which the odd meteor had rested.

"No form of life *as we know it.*"

There was the catch. After all, this interplanetary travel was less than seventy years old. Might there not be many things still unknown to Earth wisdom?

"Not according to the board of science," muttered Hartigan, thinking of Stuyvesant's blasted career.

He thought of the Forbidden Asteroids. There were over two dozen on the charts on which, even in direst emergency, no ship was supposed to land. That was because ships had landed there, and had vanished without trace. Again and again. With no man able to dream of their fate. Till they simply marked the little globes *Forbidden*, and henceforth ignored them.

No form of life as we know it!

Suppose something savage, huge, invisible, lived on those grim asteroids? Something that developed from egg form? Something that spread its young through the universe by propelling eggs from one celestial body to another? Something that started growth by devouring its own metallic shell, and continued it on a mineral instead of vegetable diet? Something that could live in any

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atmosphere or temperature?

"I *am* going crazy," Hartigan breathed.

In something like panic he tried to forget the affair in a great stack of books and magazines brought by the last supply ship.

The slow hours of another month ticked by. The full Earth waned, died, grew again. Drearily Hartigan went through the monotony of his routine. Day after day, the term "day" being a strictly figurative one on this drear lunar lump.

He rose at six, New York time, and sponged off carefully in a bit of precious water. He ate breakfast. He read. He stretched his muscles in a stroll. He read. He inspected his equipment. He read. He exercised on a set of home-made flying rings. He read.

"No human being should be called on to live like this," he said once, his voice too loud and brittle.

But human beings did have to live like this, if they aspired to one of the big posts on a main planet.

He had almost forgotten the strange meteor that had fallen into lava ash at his feet a month ago. It was to be recalled with terrible abruptness.

He went for a walk in a direction he did not usually take, and came upon a shallow pit half a mile from the dome.

Pits, of course, are myriad on the Moon. The whole surface is made up of craters within craters. But this pit was not typical in conformation. Most are smooth-walled and flat-bottomed. This pit was ragged, as if it had been dug out. Besides, Hartigan had thought he knew every hole for a mile around, and he did not remember ever seeing this one.

He stood on its edge looking down. There was loose rock in its uncrater-like bottom, and the loose rock had the appearance of being freshly dislodged. Even this was not unusual in a place where the vibration of a footstep could sometimes cause tons to crack and fall.

Nevertheless, Hartigan could feel the hair rise a bit on the back of his neck as some deep, instinctive fear crawled within him at sight of the small, shallow pit. And then he caught his lips between his teeth and stared with wide, unbelieving eyes.

On the bottom of the pit a rock was moving. It was moving, not as if it had volition of its own, but as if it were being handled by some unseen thing.

A fragment about as big as his body, it rolled over twice, then slid along in impatient jerks as though a big head or hoof nudged at it. Finally it raised up from the ground and hung poised about seven feet in the air!

Breathlessly, Hartigan watched, while all his former, almost

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superstitious fear flooded through him.

The rock fragment moved up and down in mid-space.

"Jupiter!" Clow Hartigan breathed hoarsely.

A large part of one end suddenly disappeared. A pointed projection from the main mass of rock, it broke off and vanished from sight.

Another large chunk followed, breaking off and disappearing as though by magic.

"Jupiter!"

There was no longer doubt in Hartigan's mind. A live thing had emerged from the egg-like meteor twenty-seven days ago. A live thing, that now roamed loose over the face of the Moon.

But that section of rock, which was apparently being devoured, was held seven feet off the ground. What manner of creature could come from an egg no larger than his head and grow in one short month into a thing over seven feet tall? He thought of the Forbidden Asteroids, where no ships landed, though no man knew precisely what threat lurked there.

"It must be as big as a mastodon," Hartigan whispered. "What in the universe—"

The rock fragment was suddenly dropped, as if whatever invisible thing had held it had suddenly seen Hartigan at the rim of the pit. Then the rock was dashed to one side as if by a charging body. The next instant loose fragments of shale scattered right and left up one side of the pit as though a big body were climbing up and out.

The commotion in the shale was on the side of the pit nearest Hartigan. With a cry he ran towards the hangar.

With fantastic speed, sixty and seventy feet to a jump, he covered the ragged surface. But fast as he moved, he felt that the thing behind him moved faster. And that there *was* something behind him he did not doubt for an instant, though he could neither see nor hear it.

It was weird, this pygmy human form in its bulky space suit flying soundlessly over the lunar surface under the glowing ball of Earth, racing like mad for apparently no reason at all, running insanely when, so far as the eye could tell, nothing pursued.

But abysmal instinct told Hartigan that he was pursued. And instinct told him that he could never reach the hangar in the lead. With desperate calmness he searched the ground still lying between him and the hangar.

A little ahead was a crack about a hundred feet wide and, as far as he knew, bottomless. With his oversized Earth muscles he could clear that in a gigantic leap. Could the ponderous, invisible

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thing behind him leap that far ?

He was in mid-flight long enough to turn his head and look back, as he hurtled the chasm in a prodigious jump. He saw a flurry among the rocks at the edge he had just left as something jumped after him. Then he came down on the far side, lighting in full stride like a hurdler.

He risked slowing his speed by looking back again. A second time he saw a flurry of loose rock, this time on the near side of the deep crack. The thing had not quite cleared the edge, it seemed.

He raced on and came to the small air-lock door. He flung himself inside. He had hardly got the fastener in its groove when something banged against the outside of the door.

The thing pursuing him had hung on the chasm's edge long enough to let him reach safety, but had not fallen into the black depths as he had hoped it might.

" But that's all right," he said, drawing a great sigh of relief as he entered the hangar through the inner door. " I don't care what it does, now that I'm inside and it's out."

He got out of the space suit, planning as he moved.

The thing outside was over seven feet tall and made of some unflesh-like substance that must be practically indestructible. At its present rate of growth it would be as big as a small space liner in six months, if it weren't destroyed. But it would have to be destroyed. Either that, or Emergency Station RC_3 would have to be abandoned, and his job with it, which concerned him more than the station.

" I'll call Stacey to send a destroyer," he said crisply.

He moved towards the Bliss transmitter, eyes glinting. Things were happening on the Moon now, all right ! And the thing that was happening was going to prove Stuyvesant as sane as any man, much saner than the grey-bearded goats on the board of science.

He would be confined to the hangar till Stacey could send a destroyer. No more strolls. He shuddered a little as he thought of how many times he must have missed death by an inch in his walks during the past month.

Hartigan got halfway to the Bliss transmitter, skirting along the wall near the small air lock.

A dull, hollow, booming sound filled the great hangar, ascending to the vaulted roof and seeming to shower down again like black water.

Hartigan stopped and stared at the wall beside him. It was bulging inwards a little. Startled out of all movement, he stared at the ominous, slight bulge. And as he stared, the booming noise was repeated, and the bulge grew a bit larger.

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" In the name of Heaven ! "

The thing outside had managed to track him along the wall from the air lock, perhaps guided by the slight vibration of his steps. Now it was blindly charging the huge bulk of the hangar like a living, ferocious ram.

A third time the dull, terrible, booming sound reverberated in the lofty hangar. The bulge in the tough metal wall spread again ; and the two nearest supporting beams gave ever so little at the points of strain.

Hartigan moved back towards the air lock. While he moved, there was silence. The moment he stopped, there was another dull, booming crash and a second bulge appeared in the wall. The thing had followed him precisely, and was trying to get at him.

The colour drained from Hartigan's face. This changed the entire scheme of things.

It was useless to radio for help now. Long before a destroyer could get here, the savage, insensate monster outside would have opened a rent in the wall. That would mean Hartigan's death from escaping air in the hangar.

Crash !

Who would have dreamed that there lived anywhere in the universe, on no matter how far or wild a globe, a creature actually able to damage the massive walls of a Spaceways hangar ? He could see himself trying to tell about this.

" An animal big enough to crack a hangar wall ? And invisible ? Well ! "

Crash !

The very light-globes, so far overhead, seemed to quiver a bit with the impact of this thing of unguessable nature against the vast semisphere of the hangar. The second bulge was deep enough so that the white enamel which coated it began chipping off in little flakes at the bulge's apex.

" What the devil am I going to do ? "

The only thing he could think of for the moment was to move along the wall. That unleashed giant outside must not concentrate too long on any one spot.

He walked a dozen steps. As before, the ramming stopped while he was in motion, to start again as he halted. As before, it started at the point nearest to him.

Once more a bulge appeared in the wall, this time bigger than either of the first two. The metal sheets sheathing the hangar varied a little in strength. The invisible terror outside had struck a soft spot.

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Hartigan moved hastily to another place.

"The whole base of the hangar will be scalloped like a pie-crust at this rate," he gritted.

"What can I— " *Crash!*

He had inadvertently stopped near a rack filled with spare power bulbs. With its ensuing attack the blind fury had knocked the rack down onto the floor.

Hartigan's jaw set hard. Whatever he did must be done quickly. And it must be done by himself alone. He could not stay at the Bliss transmitter long enough to get New York and tell what was wrong, without giving the gigantic thing outside a fatal number of minutes in which to concentrate on one section of wall.

He moved slowly around the hangar, striving to keep the invisible fury too occupied in following him to get in more than an occasional charge. As he walked, his eyes went from one heap of supplies to another in search of a possible means of defence.

There were ordinary weapons in plenty, in racks along the wall. But none of these, he knew, could do material harm to the attacking fury. He got to the great inner doors of the main air lock in his slow march around the hangar. And here he stopped, eyes glowing thoughtfully.

The huge doors had threatened in the early days to be the weak points in the Spaceways hangars. So the designers, like good engineers, had made the doors so massive that in the end they were stronger than the walls around them.

Bang!

A bulge near the massive hinges told Hartigan that the thing outside was as relentless as ever in its effort to break through the wall and get at him. But he paid no attention to the new bulge. He was occupied with the doors.

If the invisible giant could be trapped in the main air lock between the outer and inner portals—

"Then what?" Hartigan wondered.

He could not answer his own question. But, anyway, it seemed like a step in the right direction to have the attacking fury penned between the doors rather than to have it loose and able to charge the more vulnerable walls.

"If I can coop it in the air lock, I might be able to think of some way to attack it," he went on.

He pushed home the switch which controlled the broadcast power for opening the outer doors. And *that* gave him an idea that sent a wild thrill surging through him.

A heavy rumble told him that the motors were swinging open the outer doors.

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"Will the thing come in?" he asked himself tensely. "Or has it sense enough to scent a trap?"

Bang!

The inner doors trembled a little on their broad tracks. The invisible monster had entered the trap.

"Trap?" Hartigan smiled mirthlessly. "Not much of a trap! Left to itself, it could probably break out in half an hour. But it won't be left to itself."

He reversed the switch to close the outer portals. Then, with the doors closed and the monster penned between, he got to work on the idea that had been born when he pushed the control switch.

Power, oceans of it, flooded from the power unit at the touch of a finger. A docile servant when properly channelled, it could be the deadliest thing on the Moon.

He ran back down the hangar to the stock room, and got out a drum of spare power cable. As quickly as was humanly possible, he rolled the drum back to the doors unwinding the cable as he went.

It was with grim solemnity that he made his next move. He had to open the inner doors a few inches to go on with his frail plan of defence. And he had to complete that plan before the thing in the air lock could claw them open still more and charge through. For all their weight the doors rolled in perfect balance; and if the unseen terror could make dents in the solid wall, it certainly was strong enough to move the partly opened doors.

Speed! That was the thing that would make or break him. Speed, and hope that the power unit could stand a terrific overload without blowing a tube.

With a hand that inclined to tremble a bit, Hartigan moved the control switch operating the inner doors, and instantly cut the circuit again.

The big doors opened six inches or so, and stopped.

Hartigan cut off the power unit entirely, and dragged the end of the spare power cable to it. With flying fingers he disconnected the cable leading from the control switch to the motors that moved the portals, and connected the spare cable in its space.

He glanced anxiously at the doors, and saw that the opening between them had widened to more than a foot. The left door moved a little even as he watched.

"I'll never make it!"

But he went ahead.

Grabbing up the loose end of the cable, he threw it in a tangled coil as far as he could through the opening and into the air lock. Then he leaped for the power unit—and watched.

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The cable lay unmoving on the air-lock floor. But the left door moved! It jerked, and rolled open another six inches.

Hartigan clenched his hands as he stared at the inert cable. He had counted on the blind ferocity of the invisible terror; had counted on its attacking, or at least touching, the cable immediately. Had it enough intelligence to realize dimly that it would be best to avoid the cable? Was it going to keep on working at those doors till—

The power cable straightened with a jerk. Straightened, and hung still, with the loose end suspended in mid-air about six feet off the air-lock floor.

Hartigan's hand slammed down. The broadcast power was turned on to the last notch.

With his heart hammering in his throat, Hartigan gazed through the two-foot opening between the doors. Gazed at the cable through which was coursing oceans, Niagaras of power. And out there in the air lock a thing began to build up from thin air into a spectacle that made him cry out in wild horror.

He got a glimpse of a massive block of a head, eyeless and featureless, that joined with no neck whatever to a barrel of a body. He got a glimpse of five legs, like stone pillars, and of a sixth that was only a stump. ("That's what got caught in the doors a month ago—its leg," he heard himself babbling with insane calmness.) Over ten feet high and twenty feet long the thing was, a living battering-ram, painted in the air in sputtering, shimmering, blue sparks that streamed from its massive bulk in all directions.

Just a glimpse he got, and then the monster began to scream as it had that first day when the door maimed it. Only now it was with a volume that tore at Hartigan's ear-drums till he screamed himself in agony.

As he watched, he saw the huge carcass melt a little, like wax in flame, with the power cable also melting slowly and fusing into the cavernous, rocky jaws that had seized it. Then with a rush the whole bulk disintegrated into a heap of loose mineral matter.

Hartigan turned off the power unit and collapsed, with his face in his hands.

The shining ball of the full Earth floated a smooth diamond between two vast, angular mountains. The full Earth.

Hartigan turned from the port-hole beside the small air lock and strode to the Bliss radio transmitter.

"RC_3, RC_3, RC_3," he droned out.

There was no answer. As usual, Stacey was taking his time about answering the Moon's signal.

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"RC_3, RC_3—"

There he was.

"Hartigan talking. Monthly report."

"All right, Hartigan." A hurried, fretful voice. Come on, Moon; report that, as always, nothing has happened.

"Lunar conditions the same," said Hartigan. "No ships have put in, or have reported themselves as being in distress. The hangar is in good shape, with no leaks."

"Right," said Stacey, in the voice of a busy man. "Supplies?"

"You might send up a blonde."

"Be serious, please. Supplies?"

"I need some new power bulbs."

"I'll send them on the next ship. Nothing irregular to report?"

Hartigan hesitated.

On the floor of the main air lock was a mound of burned, bluish, mineral substance giving no indication whatever that it had once possessed outlandish, incredible life. In the walls of the hangar were a dozen new dents; but ricocheting meteors might have made those. The meteoric shell from which this bizarre animal had come had been devoured, so even that was not left for investigation.

He remembered the report of the board of science on Stuyvesant.

"Therefore, in our judgment, Benjamin Stuyvesant suffered from hallucination—" He would have liked to help Stuyvesant. But, on the other hand, Stuyvesant had a job with a secondhand-space-suit store now, and was getting along pretty well in spite of Spaceways' dismissal.

"Nothing irregular to report?" repeated Stacey.

Hartigan stared, with one eyebrow sardonically raised, at the plump brunette on the pink *Radio Gazette* cover pasted to the wall. She stared coyly back over a bare shoulder.

"Nothing irregular to report," Hartigan said steadily.

* * *

STAR-BRIGHT

All day a storm has crept
Over the hills,
And where the rose once slept
Small miracles
Tremble about each thorn,
Petal and leaf.
And so is beauty born
Star-bright and brief.

HARO HODSON, *The Visitor*

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CALLING MULDOON!

He could shoot a line that would deceive the Air Chief Marshal himself

by GEOFFREY KING

IT must have been six years ago, I thought, my brain reeling with shock, that Muldoon first entered my life.

The Commanding Officer of the station to which we had been posted after V.J. Day was driven nearly crazy trying to organize and accommodate the hotch-potch that gathered there from every direction as one squadron after another disbanded. In his struggle to keep us happy he lit on a bright idea; he inaugurated what he called an aircrew mess. While he had probably done this to restore the sedate atmosphere of the officers' mess as it had existed before the descent, we aircrew endorsed his idea happily.

There stood between the officers' and the sergeants' messes a brick building and it was here that a bar was installed, with some chairs and a coconut-matting carpet. At 8 o'clock the bar opened, and officers and sergeants who had flown together would foregather, drink large quantities of beer, sing bawdy songs, and play the mad games that from their very madness had helped to keep us all sane during the war years.

Needless to say my crew had made the best possible use of this building and Mike Carmody had managed to keep our spirits from sinking to suicidal depths.

Mike had been my tail gunner. A southern Irishman, he had volunteered for the R.A.F. because he relished a fight. Short and stocky, with a mop of unruly sandy hair, nothing could keep him down for any length of time. A voracious talker, an enthusiastic and cheerful drinker, he was always in the centre of anything going on, and if nothing entertaining turned up, then, "bejabers," he would start something.

This particular evening was perhaps our fourth or fifth on the station. The days had been spent in idling about, wondering if we would ever fly again, brooding on our sedentary life of lectures and "enforced sport." Consequently spirits were low and a heavy silence hung over the mess.

Small groups were muttering together, clustered at the bar and imbibing an alarming number of pints, when the stillness was

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shattered by a stentorian voice appealing for quiet. The voice was, of course, Mike's. When I caught sight of his flushed face, I realised that he must have knocked back a lot of beer. There he stood, arms akimbo, tunic unbuttoned, his hair on end. Everyone was now staring at him. "Is Sergeant Muldoon here?" he shouted. "Muldoon. You're wanted by the C.O."

We all looked curiously at every n.c.o. in the place, while they eyed one another. As yet no one was sure of anyone else's name and any sergeant in the mess might easily have been Muldoon.

No one stepped forward, and finally the Adjutant of the station, who was enjoying a pint in this unhallowed hall, said to me: "Wonder what the old man wants with Muldoon?" He finished his pint and walked over to Mike. I followed.

"Flight-Sergeant," I heard the Adjutant address Mike. "Do up your jacket and then tell me where you got that message."

"Yes sir. Sorry sir, about the jacket, I mean." Mike buttoned it up apologetically. "An orderly, sir, he asked me if I knew this sergeant, a man by the name of Muldoon. I told him I'd shout out the man's name for him. It seems the C.O. was on the blower—the telephone I mean, begging your pardon." Mike seemed to me to be putting it on rather thick tonight. "But don't you be bothering yourself about it, sir, I'll find the boyo for you and tell him to report himself to the C.O. at once."

Before the Adjutant could reply, Mike had turned on his heel and disappeared in the general direction of the sergeants' mess.

Perhaps it was the cool evening air, perhaps the more urgent need for further liquid nourishment, anyway the Adjutant shrugged his shoulders and went back to the bar. What, I wondered, could Mike be up to? I began to feel sorry for Sergeant Muldoon; I was pretty sure he was going to be the victim of one of Mike's schemes.

Half an hour later Mike returned, ordered himself a drink, and informed the Adjutant politely that he had found Muldoon washing his smalls in the bath, had given him the message, and that everything was now under control.

From that moment Sergeant Muldoon seemed seldom to be out of earshot. Every evening shouts would go up for Muldoon to go to the telephone, for Muldoon to report to dispersal. Usually Mike would do the shouting, but quite often it would be the unfortunate orderly whose task it was to get enough quiet to deliver his message. Letters, with local postmarks on them, would arrive and be filed in the "M" box of the sergeants' mess and, after a short delay, would disappear.

Once, if memory serves me correctly, when Mike was Duty Sergeant, Muldoon was requested over the station Tannoy system

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to report immediately to the Duty Sergeant. Within ten days Muldoon was the best-known sergeant on the camp.

During the next few weeks, to keep us out of mischief, we found ourselves doing a lot of flying. Aircraft were being sent to outposts of the British Isles, where they were to be left to rot. During these long and tedious flights, Mike would entertain us with the many adventures, amorous and otherwise, which had befallen himself and Muldoon.

I saw little of Mike during this time. He was, I had no doubt, fully occupied with his new friend; it seemed natural that, having found a fellow-Irishman, a southern Irishman at that, Mike should throw in his lot with him.

One evening, however, I ran into Mike at the local pub. He was resplendent in a new blue uniform. It was such a shock to see him looking so tidy that I remarked on it.

"Ah, 'tis thanks to Muldoon that I look so neat and tidy." Mike beamed at me over the top of his tankard. "I've been trying to get a new blue from those store-bashers ever since we came to this place, but would they let me have one? No, they would not! But up comes young Muldoon, who can shoot a line that would deceive the Air Chief Marshal himself, and pleads that he needs one, and then, being my size, he hands it over to me saying that he already has a nice neat uniform and it would be a great pleasure if I'd accept this one. Not wanting to hurt his feelings after he'd been to so much trouble, I took it." Mike slapped me on the back. "How about another pint of this wallop?"

A few days later, the blow which had threatened us ever since the end of the war descended at last. We were made redundant. This meant that we were no longer required for flying duties and that we must find other employment until we were demobilised or, as in my own case, our applications for permanent commissions came through.

I found myself made Temporary Adjutant and Flight-Sergeant Mike Carmody somehow wangled himself into the comfortable job of Orderly Room Sergeant. Almost simultaneously Mike got his warrant, and, on reading through the list that promulgated this promotion, I noticed that Muldoon got his crown with effect from the same day.

"Ah, 'tis a great day indeed for the Irish," Mike informed me as we went into the nearest town to celebrate his promotion. "I'm mighty glad me pal Muldoon got his crown at the same time."

I murmured something about it being a happy coincidence and asked why Muldoon hadn't joined us. "Ah, he's got a popsy, you know, and he's gone there to celebrate. I think he's got his feet well under the table." He smiled sadly.

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It was the following day and I was down at dispersal with Mike watching some aircraft taking off. I heard the Tannoy click on, and out came the announcement with which we had already grown over-familiar: "Will Flight-Sergeant Muldoon please report to Dispersal A at once?"

I turned to smile at Mike and found myself staring at him. The expression on his face was one of sheer amazement. His mouth hung open, his head was cocked on one side, as he listened to the message being repeated.

"Did you hear what I heard?" he gasped, his eyes still boggling in his head.

"Why yes," I replied. "What's so surprising in that?"

"Golly Moses!" he whispered. Then: "I'll be going down there right this minute to find what's up." He turned and sped towards Dispersal A as quickly as he could. I watched his disappearing figure in wonderment for I had never seen Mike move so quickly in my life unless towards a pint of beer.

I didn't see him till the following morning, and when I did, it was a very thoughtful, very subdued Mike.

"Well, what was all the rush about yesterday?" I demanded.

"When I got to Dispersal A, there was the Old Man himself. All got up and ready to fly. He just gave me a look and said: 'You Muldoon?' He didn't wait for me to reply, he just went on: 'Damned elusive fellow. I'm flying C—Charlie; be in it in five minutes.'" Mike sat down on the grass and groaned. "We flew for hours and hours, and is he terrible? Holy smoke, it was a bad time that I had."

"But why you? Where was Muldoon?" I asked.

"Muldoon?" Mike gave a hollow laugh. Then he jerked up and stared at me. "Do you mean to tell me you haven't guessed?"

"Guessed what?"

"Why, about Muldoon. Holy Moses, that's wonderful." He threw his head back and bellowed like a bull. His whole frame shook with pleasure. Finally he controlled himself. "It's like this," he gasped. "It was such a dull station and the other n.c.o.s around here were such a humourless bunch of urchins that I invented a pal for meself."

"Muldoon?" I asked. Mike nodded. It was my turn to laugh. I couldn't stop for nearly five minutes. Mike waited in resigned silence.

Finally I gasped: "And now your monster . . ."

"Monster nothing," interrupted Mike indignantly. "He's a fine upstanding young Irishman." Then he went on more soberly. "But as a matter of fact I feel I may have overdone it a bit when I promoted him. You see, it was I who had to check that list of

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promotions, and it seemed such a pity to leave me pal off it that I added his name. You know someone else must have read that list."

"Of course someone else has. Heavens, you've really done it now!" I gave him a cigarette and lit one myself. "What happened down at the dispersal yesterday?"

"Well, like I told you. The C.O. wanted to fly, he wanted a gunner—as ballast, I should think, judging from his landings. He wanted Muldoon. Well, as there was no Muldoon, I became him. We flew for hours and hours. The others had nice warm flying kit on but I hadn't time and there I was, frozen stiff, scared stiff, and a very unhappy boy in case I should be recognised and the whole thing be busted wide open. But worse was to follow. When we finally landed and it was over, the Old Man, he turns to me and says he: 'Thank you, Flight-Sergeant. I like the way you didn't complain. I'm a bit out of practice but I'm going to rectify that. I intend to get some more flying hours in and you can consider yourself in my crew.'"

Mike groaned, for once his fertile imagination could suggest no way out of his dilemma. I sat back and roared with laughter.

Two days later came the crisis in Muldoon's life. I was having a cup of tea in the mess and thinking about my leave, which was coming up in a fortnight's time, when I was called to the telephone.

"Ah Bill, it's glad I am to find you in." Mike sounded upset.

"What is it, Mike?" I asked.

"It's Muldoon. Can you meet me tonight at the local boozer?"

"Yes, I'll go down there." I was curious and a little worried. "What's up?"

"Ah, what isn't? But I'll see you tonight. I'm thinking it isn't safe to talk on the station phone but I will say one thing." There was a slight pause. "Muldoon has surely done it this day and no mistake."

I found Mike, not in the centre of the bar holding forth as usual, but tucked away in a corner drinking his beer in mournful silence. He saw me enter and raised a hand. He looked so dismally unhappy that I felt a shock of alarm as I hurried over to him.

He ordered me a drink and had his tankard filled, drew me close to him, and whispered dramatically: "He was on Pay Parade today."

"He?" I queried stupidly.

"Muldoon, Muldoon. Who else?"

"What do you mean?" I felt a desire to laugh, but one look at Mike's face forbade that.

"I mean just that. His name was called out by the pay officer. There I was waiting outside the door for a type to whom I'd lent a quid during the week. I didn't want him to have a chance to

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spend it, you see. And then I heard the pay sergeant call out: 'Flight-Sergeant Muldoon.' Well, of course nothing happened, so he boomed it out again. When no one came out this second time, the pay officer and the witnessing officer they put their heads together, and after the loudest silence it has ever been my misfortune to hear, if you see what I mean, the next name was called out." He took a deep draught from his tankard, and then his irrepressible grin lit his features. "Bill, don't you see what's happened, man? Muldoon is on squadron strength now."

"Oh," was all I could summon. Then: "Muldoon must be disposed of, Mike. Quietly, quickly, effectively and completely."

"I'm afraid you're right," Mike nodded sadly. "I hate to part with him but he's sort of outgrown himself as it were."

"How do you propose to get rid of him?"

"Well, I have a method, but it's up to you really." Mike left me to cogitate this alarming statement while he had our mugs filled.

When he got back, I demanded: "What do you mean—'up to me?' He's your brain child. You get rid of him. Frankenstein destroyed his own monster—you do your own dirty work."

"Ah, Bill, you wouldn't leave your pal in the lurch now, would you? It would be the easiest thing in the world for me to do it if only I had some braid round my arm. However, let me explain what I have in mind. No, give me a chance." He lit a cigarette and continued, his eyes appealing, his expression one of deep trust. "A posting came in today. It's for one officer who has to be a navigator and ten n.c.o. aircrew of various categories. There aren't any names mentioned, just trades. Now the way I see it is that we send nine bodies along with the officer and tell him that the tenth one will report direct to the new station from leave."

I interrupted: "The tenth one being Muldoon who now joins the ranks of deserters."

"That's right. I hate to do it to him, really, it seems a scurvy trick, but what other solution is there?"

I didn't like his scheme at all. It seemed fraught with danger. I wouldn't have been such a coward about my small part in it, had it not been that I was hoping to make the Air Force my career. However, several pints later he had persuaded me that there was no other solution, and he pointed out that I had enjoyed Muldoon, and therefore it was only just that I should be in at the death.

The next morning I disliked the idea heartily, but I was committed. My side of the bargain was merely to initial the list, show it to the C.O., see that the warrants were signed, and hand everything over to the officer in charge of the posting. As I finished the dirty work, I calculated that, if things did go wrong, I should probably get posted considerably more quickly so that, in a round-

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about sort of way, Muldoon's last fling might do me a favour.

Mike came to my office with the list in his hand. As he turned to leave he said : " You know, it's a funny thing, I can see Muldoon quite clearly. He doesn't want to get posted at all. I got to know him pretty well, really. I'm going to miss him."

I said nothing. There is something incomprehensible about the Irish. They really do believe in will-o'-the-wisps, leprechauns and other fantasia, they see them and talk to them, and when they don't have them around, their inventive imaginations formulate something else. Muldoon was Mike's private leprechaun.

It was over. I sent for the officer in charge of the posted party. He was a very young pilot officer. It seemed a dirty trick to play on him, but with his innocent face and manner I was sure that, if the plan did go sour on us, he would never be held responsible.

" Well, there it is, O'Mally." I spoke to him in my most authoritative voice. " You'll take the nine bodies up to Kilbreach and Flight-Sergeant Muldoon will report there directly from leave. He's taken his kit home with him. Is that clear ? "

" Yessssir." It came out like a shot—all in one word.

" Well, good luck."

There he went and there went Muldoon.

As day followed day and no signal arrived, Mike and I began to breathe more easily. By some miracle, perhaps because the Air Ministry had so many postings on their hands and so many people travelling in all directions, Muldoon had disappeared completely, and no one was going to suffer for his brief life.

My leave came up, and on return I found that Mike was due to be demobilised, and that my permanent commission had come through and I was to be posted back to flying duties.

All that was nearly six years ago and now I came back to the present. There stood a sergeant, at attention, watching curiously.

" Nothing wrong, I 'ope, sir ? " He coughed self-consciously, " You went quite white when I 'anded you that signal."

" No, thank you, Sergeant, nothing wrong." I picked up the signal. It was addressed to the Officer Commanding South Banshing and that is why it had been delivered to me. There was an Air Ministry number and then the message :

Request for Gunnery Officer granted. With immediate effect 204672 Flying Officer Patrick Muldoon posted South Banshing.

* * *

When you have read this copy of ARGOSY why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces ?

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PASS THE PORT

Let the toast pass,—
Drink to the lass,
I'll warrant she'll prove
an excuse for a glass

RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN

The advertiser, having made an advantageous purchase, offers for sale on very low terms about six dozen of prime Port Wine, late the property of a gentleman forty years of age, full in body and with a high bouquet.

Advertisement in The Daily Courant, January, 1712

Port for Men

We very much revere our sires
Who were a splendid race of men;
For every glass of Port we drink
They nothing thought of ten.

SIR GEORGE TREVELYAN, *The Ladies in Parliament*

Bench — and Bar

At Edinburgh, the old judges had a practice at which even their barbaric age used to shake its head. They always had wine and biscuits on the bench, when the business was clearly to be protracted beyond the usual dinner hour . . .

Black bottles of strong Port were set down beside them on the bench with glasses, carafes of water, tumblers and biscuits, and this without the slightest attempt at concealment. The refreshment was generally allowed to stand untouched and as if despised for a short time, during which their lordships seemed to be intent only on their notes. But in a little some water was poured into the tumblers and sipped quietly as if only to sustain Nature. Then a few drops of wine were ventured upon but only with the water; till at last patience could endure no longer and a full bumper of the pure black element was tossed over; after which the thing went on regularly and there was a comfortable munching and quaffing to the great envy of the parched throats in the gallery . . . This however was so ordinary with these sages that it really made little apparent change upon them; and they all acquired the habit of sitting and looking judicial enough, even when their bottles had reached the lowest ebb.

LORD COCKBURN, *Memorials of his Time*

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In the Wood

Though Port should have age,
Yet I don't think it sage
To entomb it, as some of our connoisseurs do,
Till it's losing its flavour, and body, and hue;
I question if keeping does it much good
After ten years in bottle and three in the wood.

R. H. BARHAM, *Ingoldsby Legends*

List to Port

My great-grandfather's uncle, another Worshipful Mayor of Rye and therefore Warden of the Cinque Ports, was also greatly addicted to Port, and when gout and old age at last drove him to bed, his old servant explained to his nephew how he was nursing his master. "I keeps a-turning his Worship, 'cause you see, sir, he's got that much Port in his inside, he'd be bound to get crusted, if I let 'un stop too long on one side."

H. WARNER ALLEN, *Sherry and Port*

Half-Seas Over

In life three ghostly friars were we
And now three friarly ghosts we be.
Around our shadowy table placed,
The spectral bowl before us floats:
With wine that none but ghosts can taste,
We wash our unsubstantial throats.
Three merry ghosts—three merry ghosts—
three merry ghosts are we:
Let the ocean be Port, and we'll think it good sport
To be laid in that Red Sea.

With songs that jovial spectres chaunt,
Our old refectory still we haunt.
The traveller hears our midnight mirth:
"O list!" he cries, "the haunted choir!
The merriest ghost that walks the earth,
Is sure the ghost of a ghostly friar."
Three merry ghosts—three merry ghosts—
three merry ghosts are we:
Let the ocean be Port, and we'll think it good sport
To be laid in that Red Sea.

THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK

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Three-Bottle Man

I have drunk three bottle of Port without being the worse for this. University College has witnessed this. DR. JOHNSON

Duty Paid

Port! Port! No Briton ought consider that he has done his duty
Until he has felt beneath his belt
A bottle of the "Rare Old Fruity." H. G. PELISSIER

Portentous!

Sir Willoughby advanced . . . and raised a key to the level of Dr. Middleton's breast, remarking: "I am going down to my inner cellar."

"Have you anything great?"

"Port."

"Ah! We are in England . . . Hocks, too, have compassed age. I have tasted senior Hocks. Their flavours are as a brook of many voices. Senatorial Port! we say. We cannot say that of any other wine. Port is deep-sea deep. It is in its flavours deep—mark the difference. It is like a classic tragedy, organic in conception. An ancient Hermitage has the light of the antique; a merit that it can grow to an extreme old age; neither of Hermitage nor of Hock can you say that it is the blood of those long years, retaining the strength of youth with the wisdom of age. To Port for that! Port is our noblest legacy! Observe, I do not compare wines; I distinguish the qualities. Let them live together for our enrichment. They are not rivals like the Idæan Three. Were they rivals, a fourth would challenge them. Burgundy has great genius. It does wonders within its period; it does all except to keep up in the race; it is short-lived. An aged Burgundy runs with a beardless Port. I cherish the fancy that Port speaks the sentences of wisdom, Burgundy sings the inspired Ode. Or put it, that Port is the Homeric hexameter, Burgundy the Pindaric dithyramb. What do you say?"

GEORGE MEREDITH, *The Egoist*

British Type

It strengthens while it gladdens as no other wine can do; and there is something about it which must have been created in pre-established harmony with the best English character.

GEORGE SAINTSBURY, *Notes on a Cellar Book*

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WHITE COTTAGE

She lay asleep, the beatitude of her face visible even in the twilight

by L. A. G. STRONG

AS soon as they reached the lane running down to the loch, the two men were delivered abruptly from the pressure and leaping buffets of the wind. The relief was extraordinary. The young doctor, who had been labouring, head down, bent almost double, forcing each thigh forward as against a weight of water, suddenly felt his body become light and irresponsible. It wanted to leave the ground altogether. A single bound should have been enough to take him to the loch side. Then, in immediate reaction, his limbs felt shaky and weak. They were not properly under control. He took a couple of long, uncertain strides, and caught up on his companion: but he, his anxiety urging him on, plunged at a shambling run into the darkness.

"Hey, half a minute!" The doctor stumbled and stopped. Even through the noise of the storm, he somehow heard the other man stop.

"Sorry," he called. "I can't see my way."

The other was silent for a moment.

"Stand for a minute. Your eyes will get accustomed to it."

I'm damned if they will, thought the doctor; but he was glad enough of a chance to get his breath. It was as if they had come into another world. The darkness was solid, rich as the smell of wet earth and dead leaves that came in breaths from the wood. Outside, on the moor, there had been light of a sort, which, penetrating the scud and lashing rain, enabled them to see one another and distinguish the road from the heather on either side. Here there was nothing but stillness and dark, while overhead and all around came the crash of the gale and the threshing of trees in torment. It was like nothing the doctor had ever experienced. Looking up, he could now see, against a patch of sky, an agitated fringe of blackness. The tops of the trees were lashing wildly, while at the roots, where the two men were standing, there was peace.

His companion stirred impatiently, and the doctor, rousing himself, followed him. It was no use. The way grew darker as it

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ploughed deeper between the trees. The doctor could see nothing. He walked by faith for fifty yards or so, then tripped, and all but fell.

"It's no use," he called. Then, as the other, impatient, stopped again, "I'd better not break my leg, had I?"

He took a step forward, and almost bumped into his companion.

"Take hold of my coat." The voice was more friendly. "Then you'll be all right."

Meekly, the doctor obeyed. A nice fool I must look, he reflected, as he walked along, holding on to his companion's coat-tails; only, luckily, there was no one to see him, and it would be too dark, even if there were. He gave a chuckle, then cursed himself for want of consideration. Probably the man hadn't heard.

"You know," he said, over the noise of the trees, "this is a great change for me."

"I'm sure."

"I'm well accustomed to being called out at all times, of course, but it's along pavements, with plenty of lights, and a bobby to pass the time of night with at the street corner."

"It must be a change indeed."

The voice was courteous but constrained. I'm a brute to bother him, the doctor thought. All the same, he'll be the better for a talk. Sympathy lit in him, a small warm flame.

"You mustn't worry," he said. "We'll be with her soon now."

"It is the crossing I am thinking of," the other said.

"You came over all right."

"Aye. But the wind was mostly at our back. We shall have it against us. And the boat will be heavier."

"I'd like to help," said the doctor. "But I oughtn't to do too much. I may want a steady hand, when we get there."

The other did not answer at once.

"Och, you could not help," he said. "There are two of us. It would upset the rowing."

The darkness seemed to part above them: the gap widened; and, with a last twist, the road arrived beside the loch. They felt the wind again, but it was not nearly so strong as on the moor.

"Why," the doctor exclaimed, "it seems much calmer down here."

"Wait," said the other grimly. "We are sheltered."

"It's lighter, anyway," said the doctor, and, relieved from the pressure of gale and darkness, he walked along cheerfully beside his companion. "How far is it to the boat?"

"A quarter of a mile."

There was a silence. The doctor spoke again.

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"Is yours the cottage one can see right across the other side of the loch, at the foot of the mountain?"

"Aye."

"I was looking at it the other day, when I was coming back from seeing to one of the children at the farm up on the hill there."

"John Mackenzie's."

"Yes, that's the place. I looked over, and I thought to myself that's an out-of-the-way place to live."

"It is so."

"Aren't you very lonely, all by yourselves?"

"We have one neighbour. He is waiting for us. He helped me row over."

"Is he married?"

"No, he is a single man."

The young doctor peered sideways at his companion. He judged him to be nearer forty than thirty. Well-spoken, an educated voice; but then, all the people of this district spoke well and musically. What on earth could persuade a man to live in such a God-forsaken spot? The tiny white cottage, huddled at the foot of the huge green wall of mountain, seemed a very symbol of loneliness.

"You know," he said, "it would be better, when these events are coming on, to move your wife to some more accessible place beforehand."

"Move my wife?" The voice was shocked. "*Move* her?"

"Yes. Bring her into the village. To some neighbour's. Surely someone would be only too glad to give her a room."

"Och," said the other, recovering speech, "she would never go. She would never think of being anywhere but in her own house. And who would do the work?"

"Someone will have to do it now."

"Och yes, but—"

Evidently I've put my foot in it, thought the doctor. Some local taboo, I suppose. It's all damned fine; but here I have to go on a wild-goose chase, get soaked to the skin, drowned maybe . . .

"You know," he said. "It might in certain circumstances be very dangerous to wait out there. You might be obliged to move her. In which case it would be more sensible to move her while she is well than afterwards."

The other was silent for a moment. When he spoke, his voice was distant.

"As I was telling you, doctor, it has come upon her suddenly. We were not expecting it for a week or ten days."

The doctor cursed his inexperience. Now he had gone and offended the poor chap. Frightened him, too, most likely. He

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kicked at the road, trying to be angry with his companion, but succeeding only in being angrier with himself.

It was lighter. The scud overhead was vaguely luminous.

"The moon is trying to get through."

"Aye, maybe."

They turned a corner, and saw dim shapes ahead of them, which emerged as a rock, a small tree, and a jetty. The waves of the loch were slapping and splashing against the rock. There was more wind.

A figure rose from the gloom, and confronted them. A voice asked a question in Gaelic.

"Aye."

"Good evening," said the doctor, stepping forward. He felt the need to assert himself.

"Good evening."

The neighbour's voice suggested that the doctor was a regrettable necessity, something impersonal, like medicine or sheep dip, which had to be secured, but was otherwise negligible. Without further word, he turned and led the way down to the boat.

It was not so dark by the loch's edge, and the young doctor noted once more the uncanny power of water to collect more light than there appeared to be in the sky. Even as he thought it, a sudden gust of wind made him stagger, and a shower of drops was flung in his face.

"There's plenty of wind, after all," he said ruefully, to no one in particular.

"Aye. There is wind enough."

The man who had fetched him was in the boat, feeling for something. The other stood on the jetty.

"Where shall I sit?" The doctor was anxious to show that he was not altogether a novice. "In the bows?"

There was a brief exchange of Gaelic.

"No. The waves are too big. They would come inside the boat."

"As you like. You'll want some weight in the bows, though, won't you, if we are heading into it?"

There was a silence. They don't like being told their business, thought the doctor. I don't care. I'm not going to have them treating me as a child. He planted his feet firmly against the wind, and leaned back, tilting up his face to the rain. The drops came, not steadily, but like a series of sharp, indignant backhanders. He heard a scraping noise, stooped, peered, and saw that his companions were putting a large stone in the bows.

"Now, doctor. If you will be so kind."

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With the rain in his face, it was not easy to judge distance. As he hesitated, a hand reached up and grasped his. Angrily, he leaped down. The boat bounced and swayed. He all but fell over sideways, but the hand held him firm.

"Steady. There you are."

The doctor sat on the wet thwart. He stowed his bag safely underneath, hunched up his shoulders, pulled the ends of his mackintosh down over his knees, and braced himself to endure worse discomfort. That the crossing could be actively dangerous he did not believe. He had all a townsman's faith in the inevitability of getting where he wanted. His job was the important thing; it had to be done. He could not really conceive of any valid obstacle. He had never before failed to reach a case, and he was not going to fail now.

The boat was away. The shore, a vague blackness, receded, became a blur, and was lost. They were adrift in a grey universe, troubled, faintly luminous. The boat bobbed and bounced, the water slapped and gurgled. It was not so bad.

Then the rain, which had eased, was suddenly intensified. A squall took the boat, spinning her round like a shell. The rain came in sheets: the doctor had to bend his head to breathe. Three separate cold rivulets ran down his chest. A moment later, they were no longer distinguishable. He was soaked to the skin. He gasped, and looked up. The huddled figures before him were fighting to get the boat straight on her course. Grimly, doggedly, they dug their oars deep into the water, and with short, chopping strokes brought her round. A wave came and sat in the doctor's lap. He noticed it, with faint surprise.

Then, suddenly, things were easier. They were pulling left, to correct the error in their course. The boat was steadier. The rowers took longer strokes. The doctor stirred from his cramped posture, and felt his clothes move cold and wet against him.

"That's better," he ventured.

"Aye. We are under the lee of the island."

Peering to his right, the doctor thought he could see, not so much a shape, as an obstruction to the prevailing luminous greyness. It spread, and grew darker. Indefinitely, but perceptibly, the wind leaned away from them, and was lost overhead. The dark blur was suddenly very near. There was a sharp word from the man in the bow, and the boat jerked away at an angle.

The water was almost calm here. All around, the wind could be heard, with a crash like that of a perpetually breaking wave, but here there was the illusion of stillness. For the first time, the doctor could hear the hiss and tingle of rain upon the water.

The gloom began to recede upon the right. It was getting

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lighter. Something happened in the air above their heads. The rain whispered and stopped.

"Are we clearing the point of the island?"

"Aye. And the squall is passing."

The doctor stared ahead. Light was growing in the sky, vague, sickly, like a mildewy stain. As it spread, the shape of the island darkened, and the figures in the boat took on firm outlines. Turning his head, the doctor saw that they were quite close to the island. As he stared, the dark outline metamorphosed into a rock, a streak of dirty whitish sand, a rising bank, and the trunks of trees.

All came to ghastly life as he watched. Upon the tree trunks, the rocks, the dripping bushes, appeared odd mucus-like patches of pallor, so shamefaced that he did not at first recognize them as light. Puzzled as to their cause, he looked up, and saw the weak shape of the moon, like a false florin, fleeing sideways through an unhealthy haze that thinned as he watched. His eyes upon the reeling disc, he saw it pale, blur, darken, reappear; there was suddenly a great torn hole in the sky to the right of it, pricked by a star; something glittered beyond the bows; and the moon leaped out, laughing in triumphant brilliance. The diseased, nightmare island had vanished, and in its place stood shining rock, winking, jewelled bushes, and pine stems splashed with silver.

But he was given no time to admire the island. Hastily the two pulled across a little bay to the farther point, whence they could see the strip of water, three-quarters of a mile wide, which they had yet to cross.

The sky was open now, but it would not be so for long. Away to the north-west was a vague, upheaved mass, like a sheep's fleece, its edges combed and fluffed to an incredible softness. It looked motionless; yet, even as one watched, it was larger and higher up in the sky.

The doctor looked over at the mountain. The summit was drowned in cloud, lit on the top to strange loveliness, but dark and forbidding underneath. The cloud reached halfway down. At the foot, tiny, forlorn, could be seen the white face of the cottage.

Between it and them lay a belt of beaten silver. Close to them, where the water was moderately calm, its motion could be seen. Near at hand were ripples. Farther out, the water felt the edges of the wind, and a current streamed sideways, thoughtful, with dark stipplings, in shape like a partly opened fan. Beyond that, where the waves leaped, all appeared static, a frozen band of tumbled silver crests. Only by the closest peering could he detect that it was in angry movement.

"We must make a run for it."

"We will not get there before it, Allan," said the neighbour.

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"We must try. The next squall may be longer."

And, looking, the doctor saw that the fleecy cloud had risen enormously, and its mass was darker.

Settling down, the two men rowed hard, and drove the boat through the brief stretch of quiet water. The trees on the lee side of the island had been still. Now, before the boat felt it, they caught the wind, rolling and tossing in an agitation that, from below, seemed meaningless. Another few seconds, and the first whiff caught the boat. The water ruffled and came at them sideways.

The doctor felt cold jets of air squirt down his neck, reminding him that his underclothes were sodden. He shifted on his seat, and looked ahead. The wind stiffened at each second. They would have to bear to the right, he saw, in order to take the waves bow on, and not be carried out of their course. Then they might—

Bump! With a shock so sudden he thought they had run on a rock, the first wave butted them under the bows. Another, and another: the doctor's knees were jerked upwards, the breath was shot from his lungs. He caught at the gunwale, and leaned forward, to avoid being tilted over on his back.

At first, it seemed impossible that the boat should live, let alone that she should make progress. To row was like trying to force the boat over broken ice, or up the side of a cottage. Yet the two maniacs went on pulling. The boat did not go down.

Buffeted, jolted, bumped, the doctor tried to protect himself, to keep his seat, to learn a rhythm which would allow him to breathe. Grasping the gunwale on each side, he tensed his muscles, dug in his heels, and tried by main force to press his buttocks down on the leaping thwart. It was so fantastically difficult that he almost laughed. Ride her, cowboy!

A second, professional thought warned him swiftly that, at this rate, when they got to the cottage, his arms would be shaking and aching, and he would be as weak as a cat. Perhaps it would be better to relax, and—a blow that made him bite his tongue supplied the answer, and he sat, in mingled alarm and rage.

He forcibly detached his attention from the boat, and tried to look ahead. It was not easy, for the boat reared like a bucking horse, and, as soon as he caught sight of the silvery expanse, the bodies of the rowers were thrown up at the sky and blotted it out.

In fragmentary glimpses, he managed to see that, till it came near the boat, the surface of the loch had the same stiff, immobile look as from the island. At a distance, the crests of the waves were like bright, silver cabbages. Then, nearer, they seemed, all together, to lean forward, till suddenly one would leave the rest, swell, and fling itself with disproportionate fury at the boat. Some broke ahead, were split by the bow's blackness, and creamed by in rushing

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magnificence. Others got underneath the boat, threw up their heads, and seemed to knock her right up into the air, so that it was with a bruised astonishment that he found himself still on the surface at all.

It was all mad, too mad to think about. The doctor gave up trying, and was gradually buffeted into a trance. He was aware of his surroundings, but of little else. The violent motion ceased to be unpleasant. He was emptied of all emotion, all reflection. The dazzling belt of water leaped and fell, leaped and fell.

Abruptly he came to himself. There was a change, a new force. Something was pressing against his right side, against the whole boat. He looked around, feeling the clothes wet against his neck. The water ahead was not so bright: it seemed to frown as he watched.

Wind—more wind—blowing hard. He looked up, and saw with consternation that the woolly cloud had grown inconceivably and was towering above them. No longer did it look soft and innocent. Even its edge, where the moon caught it, was an angry blur, with a smudge of pallor. Then the boat started to leap madly from side to side, like a terrified beast on a tether. A wave, ugly, grey, seen only an instant before its attack, broke over and into the bows. The boat struggled, trembled, shook itself, and rose heavily. Before it could recover, it had shipped water from two lesser waves.

Steadying himself with one hand, the doctor leaned forward, and groped beneath the seat.

"To your right, man. Your *right*."

He nodded, fumbled on the other side, found a pan, and, wedging himself as best he could, began to bale. The next few minutes were a painful dream. Somehow he managed to hold on, and keep one hand free for baling. He baled frantically. The first thing that had really frightened him was that stunned, sluggish feel of the boat as she tried to recover from the weight of water. While she was buoyant, tossing up and down like a cork, she was distinct from the water, victimized but capable. But that slow, wounded rolling—although his arm felt red-hot, as if it was coming off at the shoulder, he kept the pan flying. He saw, in a shaft of moonlight, the almost continuous stream of water splayed out in the air.

Next time he noticed anything, he had stopped baling. It was dark. It was raining. A sickly ghost of moonlight retreated softly on their left, and was sucked up in grey, deepening darkness. But the boat was steadier. The waves were lessening. The wild jolting was over.

He decided to speak. It was an effort to recall how one did it;

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what muscles one moved. He opened his mouth twice before words came.

"What has happened?"

A spent voice gasped an answer.

"We are nearly there. Under . . . the shelter . . . the mountain."

The doctor was a mere heap of limbs and clothes. He sat upright, because that was the position into which his body had subsided. As, with each tired stroke of the oars, the water grew calmer, his interest returned. He remembered who he was and the errand on which he was bound. God, he thought, I hope it's an easy case. If it's a forc., I'm done.

They were nearing the shore. The rain was falling heavily. Once again he could hear the tingle of the drops upon the water. A few seconds more, and the bow bumped violently.

"Hullo."

"We are forgetting ourselves."

"It would not do to sink her now."

The shaken voices were trying to jest. The strain was over. All they knew was that they were safe. With each instant, sense was returning. The doctor felt for his bag. It was still there. He grasped it, but, as he tried to rise, the boat rocked violently, and he sat down again. Allan had jumped out, and could be heard stumbling off inland.

Cautiously, the doctor got up.

"He is very anxious," he said, as he took the other man's hand, and stepped out on what felt like a rough stone slip.

"He has good reason. His wife is not too young, and it is the first child."

"Is it, by damn?" said the doctor, with a chill at the heart.

He followed his companion up the slip, and felt his feet strike soft upon grass.

"It is all most unfortunate, and Nurse Ferguson not free to come. Will you be able for it, do you think?" The neighbour had evidently not much confidence in a locum.

Somehow, the question restored the doctor's good humour.

"I hope so," he said. "I've had a good many."

"Humph!" said the other, and added, "It is a misfortune, her to be taken like this. Dr. Macdonald expected to be back from his holiday in good time for her."

The doctor grinned in the darkness. He respected this dour loyalty.

"He's an old man," he said. "How does he like trips of this sort?"

"Och," said the other, "he is well used to them. He has lived his life here."

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The doctor looked up, and saw a faint light ahead. It was almost at once obscured, and the figure of Allan emerged from the gloom and grasped his arm.

"God be praised," he cried. "She is well. Nothing has happened yet. You must forgive me, doctor, for running away from you like that. I could not be easy in my mind till I had a word with her. I did not wait. I only looked in at the door to ask."

"Of course," said the doctor. He had already forgotten the crossing and his discomfort. Professional enthusiasm rose, a thin, intense warmth in his chilled body.

"Well," the neighbour halted, "I will be going now."

"Bless you, man." Allan grasped his arm. "Bless you."

"Och, it is nothing. I will stand by, in the morning, in case you want me."

"Bless you." They shook hands forcibly. "Now, doctor."

The doctor, plodding stiffly in his sodden clothes, followed Allan to the cottage. He squelched with every step. Allan opened the door, and plunged in first. When the doctor came in, put down his bag, and started to peel off his dripping mackintosh, Allan was bending over the bed in the corner.

"How are you, my darling? What a fearsome long wait for you. Oh, I am so thankful!"

"Was it terrible rough?" murmured the woman's voice. Then, as she touched his sleeve: "Och Allan, you are drenched! You are drenched to the skin. Take off your clothes this instant. Doctor—" she raised herself, peering past the lamp into the gloom. "Make him take off his wet clothes."

The doctor grinned.

"Why," said Allan, reprovingly, "the doctor is in no better case. Indeed, he is worse. We had the exercise of rowing to keep us warm. He must be perished."

"To be sure," she cried. "Doctor, what will you be thinking of me! Get the doctor a dram. Give him a g—" She lay back suddenly and groaned.

"My love!"

Allan bent over her in agony.

"It is all right." Her face was shining with sweat in the lamplight. She forced a smile. "Go on, now. Pour the doctor a good dram, and take one yourself."

"All in good time," said the doctor good-humouredly. "Let's have a look first, to see how things are. Excuse my costume," he added, for he had peeled off coat and waistcoat. "I don't want to drip over you more than I can help."

"Can I be of any use?"

"You can hold the lamp."

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Allan held it, with averted head, biting his lip. Once the doctor asked him to bring it nearer. There was silence, save for a gentle question or two, and the sound of the woman catching her breath. Once she moaned, causing Allan to tremble and shake the lamp.

The doctor stood up. A flood of relief and satisfaction warmed him.

"All is quite as it should be," he announced. "Your wife is a wonderful woman, Mr.—by the way, I don't even know your name."

"M'Kechnie. Allan M'Kechnie. You think it will be all right, doctor?"

His eagerness was pathetic. Obviously a man of strong reserve, he was utterly beaten down by his wife's ordeal.

"I do," said the doctor. "And now—what was that I heard about a dram?"

"Is there time?"

"Time and to spare. Nothing will happen for three or four hours yet."

"Of course there's time, you silly man," scolded his wife affectionately.

"In any case," said the doctor, "I prescribe a dram for us both." He wriggled. "I suppose you haven't a change of clothes you could lend me?"

Even in the lamplight, he could see Allan flush.

"I have only the one besides this, doctor, and it got wet yesterday, going to kirk. I doubt it is dry yet."

"It is not dry," said his wife.

There was a silence.

"I can't stay in these," said the doctor, half to himself.

"Allan," said his wife; and, as he bent over her, a whispered argument followed.

"Och no."

"Och *yes*."

"My wife says, would you mind putting on one of my nightshirts? They are good warm flannel."

"The very thing," cried the doctor. "I'll put my things by the fire, and, by the time they're wanted, they'll be dry. Or dry enough."

He went over to the fire, turned his back on the bed, and began to pull off the wet, clinging garments. Allan, standing carefully between him and the bed, handed him the nightshirt. Made of thick flannel, it was large as a tent.

"Here is a blanket, in case you feel the cold."

"Good." The doctor draped it round his waist like a kilt. "Unprofessional," he declared, looking down at himself, "but effective."

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He turned to Allan, who had begun to strip.

"What will you do?"

"I have my nightshirt too."

"But no kilt?"

"No kilt."

"I've pinched the only one. That's not fair."

Allan hesitated. He flushed again. "I thought, for the present, as nothing is happening—"

"Yes?"

"I might get into the bed."

"An excellent idea. You get in and keep warm. I'll sit by the fire."

"Will you be warm enough?"

"Grand."

Without paying him any more attention, the doctor pulled a chair to the fire, and methodically spread out his dripping clothes upon the hearth. There was, he noted with approval, a large kettle beside the fire. Presently he heard a creaking noise. Allan was cautiously getting into bed.

A long silence followed. For the first time since he had come in, the doctor became aware of the gale. He could hear it high overhead, rushing over the mountain, swooping on the loch in thunderous gusts. Its noise was like a memory. The cottage was sheltered under the huge shoulder of the mountain.

He glanced around the room. It seemed to be the only room in the cottage. It did not take long to see that the M'Kechnies were poor. The furniture was of the plainest. Even the chair on which he sat was rickety. There was not much crockery on the dresser. Poor devils, he thought; stuck out in this God-forsaken place, getting a living the best way they can. The place was clean, though. After some of the homes he had visited, it was a paradise.

He stirred, and shivered. In spite of fire and dram, he was not too warm. He had got thoroughly chilled in the boat. To avoid sitting still, he rose, fetched his bag, and began to get everything out. It was too soon yet to do any more. He straightened up, and swung his arms across his chest.

There was a whispering in the bed. It sounded as if the wife was saying something which shocked Allan. She persisted. There was a silence. Then she spoke.

"Doctor."

"Yes?"

"Why don't you come into the bed and keep yourself warm? There is plenty of room there beside Allan."

The doctor hesitated only for a second.

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"An excellent suggestion," he said. "Thank you, Mrs. M'Kechnie, I will."

He shed his improvised kilt, and climbed in beside Allan. There was a short, embarrassed silence, which the doctor determined to break.

"Hark at that wind," he said. "We are better off here than out on the loch, eh?"

"Indeed we are." Allan's deep voice rumbled, surprisingly close to his ear. "We shall always be grateful to you for coming, doctor."

"Nonsense. It's all a new experience to me, Mrs. M'Kechnie. I come from the town. My usual night-call is to take a bus or a tram and walk a mile among tenements and things."

"I could never live in the city," declared Mrs. M'Kechnie. The words came with an effort. The doctor raised himself on one elbow.

"Turn over on your side," he commanded. "And get your husband to rub your back. Can you get at her? Is there room? Or shall I get out?"

"No, there is room."

"Rub hard," said the doctor. "You won't hurt her."

He lay down again, making as much room as he could. Allan's back was pressed against his side and he felt it move in steady rhythmic effort. Presently Mrs. M'Kechnie whispered something, and the rubbing ceased. She and Allan lay on their backs again.

The doctor stared at the ceiling, which loomed a faint orange in the glow of the fire. The whisky crawled in his brain. He felt light again, as if his body were rising from the bed. His mind, detached and alert, perceived thoughts and images with stereoscopic clearness.

How simple life was, when one approached it sensibly! He remembered half a dozen obscene stories in which this was the central situation, husband, wife, and stranger in the same bed. From what deep springs of life those stories rose. How earthy, how sane and direct their laughter, based on the eternal verities of human nature. Yet how remote were they from the present situation. Remote, because the very place was remote. Here, in this lost cottage, cut off from the world by gale and raging waters, there were no conventions, no precedents. A situation existed by its own right and was met on its own terms. They were not bound here by any of the rules that regulated ordinary human conduct, because there was nothing to which the rules could refer. Nothing could be less scandalous than this situation, which would be so wildly scandalous once it was taken across to the other side of the water.

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He smiled into the darkness, feeling in his heart a great compassion for the follies of mankind. Cautious, idolatrous, they made rules, they tried to pin down and systematize the unique flying moment. Poor, labouring fools! Right living was not obedience to rule; it was a balance, renewed each instant, like a tight-rope-walker's, a tension between opposites.

Here, for a moment, in this bed, in this cottage, in this tiny focus of life, beneath storm and towering sky, was wisdom. Men did not possess wisdom. It possessed them. Like a light, it flickered here and there over the vast dark mass of humanity, illumining briefly every now and then a single understanding. Here, for the moment, it possessed him; and by its light he gave thanks and loved all men.

Then he must have fallen asleep, for the next thing he knew was that Allan was shaking his arm. Startled, he sat upright, and in a flash remembered.

"Doctor. Doctor."

"Right." He was out of bed with a bound. A minute later he was telling Allan to boil the kettle.

"Half a minute." The doctor stood by, in the grey filtering daylight, wiping his hands on a towel. He had just finished bathing the baby. Allan was on his knees by the hearth. "You'd better let me do that. I'm a great cook. You mightn't believe it, but I am."

"Och, doctor." Allan's hands were still shaking, and his voice not under proper control. "You have done your share of work. It is my turn now."

"I want my breakfast right," said the doctor, grinning at him. "It doesn't matter who cooks it."

The crofter looked up at him with an answering smile.

"I feel useless enough, as it is," he said. "You must not humiliate me any more, doctor. At least, I can prepare breakfast for you in my own house."

"I'm not so sure that you can." They laughed at one another affectionately, like old friends. The doctor laid down the towel. "I'll help you, anyway."

He went to the cupboard, and rummaged.

"What have we here? Coffee essence, or I'm seeing cross-eyed. You know, M'Kechnie, you are a man of rare discernment. I was sure I should have to take tea for my breakfast; and to be frank with you, I abominate tea for my breakfast."

Allan's face beamed with gratification.

"We always like to have coffee, for a special occasion."

"Well, if this isn't a special occasion, I'd like to know what is. And, talking of that—as it's such a *very* special occasion—do

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you think I might have a spot of what killed Auntie, just to keep me going till breakfast is ready ? "

" A spot of—what killed— ? "

Suddenly comprehending, Allan scrambled to his feet.

" Och, what has come to me ? I am forgetting myself altogether."

He poured out the whisky with shaking hand, one tumbler for the doctor, another for himself.

" We'll both be the better for it," declared the doctor. " And—a much more important matter—we must drink his lordship's health."

" We must indeed. And his mother's."

" And his mother's. You know, you're a lucky man, M'Kechnie. She was grand. I'm not saying it to flatter you. She was grand."

Allan, his eyes wet, looked lovingly over at his wife. She lay asleep, the beatitude of her face visible even in that twilight. He could not speak.

" Here's to her," said the doctor, raising his glass. They drank deeply. " And here's to her son. He will be worthy of her."

" He will."

Allan's faith shone in his eyes. He did not hope. He knew.

" He will grow up fine and strong, and be a credit to his parents."

" He will."

The doctor leaned back his head. He felt the whisky seize on his empty stomach, and let his mind soar on the winds of prophecy.

" He will be clever," he declared, waving his glass, " clever and able-minded."

" Aye." Allan nodded hard. " I plan a great education for him. He shall have the best schooling."

" And carry all before him."

" He shall go to the university."

" And win scholarships by the bucketful. Oh, he'll be a great man."

They drank again.

" And here's to you, M'Kechnie. Health and prosperity."

" And here is to you, doctor. I wish I could say what I am feeling."

" Nonsense."

The doctor laid a hand on his shoulder, then put down the glass. A dim shadow moved on the window. Allan started forward.

" It is Donald. He has come to know—"

He stumbled to the door, and the doctor heard him outside telling his neighbour the good news.

" Come in, come in."

" Och no. I could not disturb Mistress M'Kechnie. I will come in later on."

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Yawning, the doctor stooped over the hearth, and began to prepare breakfast. He felt suddenly tired and sleepy.

"He would not come in," said Allan, returning and shutting the door. "He will come back presently."

"Breakfast," said the doctor sleepily; and, forgetful of his boast, he sat back, smiling and blinking, to watch the other get it ready.

Three hours later, they took leave of one another at the loch side. Donald had come, and had been persuaded to take a peep at mother and child—he held his breath and drew back, as if they might explode in his face. Now he was going to row the doctor back. The storm had gone. It was a lovely, sunny morning, with small, soft clouds flying high up in a clean sky. There was still some wind, and the loch, its ruffled surface straining away from them, was the colour of gun-metal.

"I'll send the nurse over today."

"Will she be free yet, do you think?"

"Oh yes. I'll take on, if she isn't. And I'll come over myself again tomorrow afternoon."

"Och doctor, don't trouble yourself."

Courtesy struggled with natural solicitude in his voice.

"No trouble, man. It's a pleasure—besides being my plain duty. Mind you, she'll be right as rain. But I'll come."

"It is good of you, doctor. It is indeed."

"I'll come on one condition," said the doctor.

"What is that?"

"That you give me at least two cups of that splendid coffee."

"Indeed, doctor, but you shall have a kettleful."

They stopped, and shook hands. Donald, his austere countenance a little relaxed, looked on.

"Well, doctor, good-bye, and God bless you."

"God bless you, old man."

They wrung one another's hands in silence. The doctor suddenly found his eyes full of tears. Hardly able to see where he was going, he clambered into the boat. Donald pulled away. The doctor screwed round to wave. Allan stood for a minute, waving, watching the boat. When the doctor looked again, he had turned, and was making his way quickly back towards the cottage. Its whitewashed face shone, small and innocent, in the morning sun.

* * *

Good taste is better than bad taste, but bad taste is better than no taste at all.

ARNOLD BENNETT

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Novels in Outline

THE MOONSTONE

A Romance

by WILKIE COLLINS

Holidays are ahead—and in the next few months Argosy will suggest in outline some holiday reading among the great—but lesser-known—novels of the past. Our July choice is "The Moonstone" of which Mr. T. S. Eliot has said that it is "the first, the longest and the best of the modern English detective novels." Modern? Well, comparatively speaking, of course! Wilkie Collins, born 1824, was twelve years younger than his friend Charles Dickens, with whom he collaborated. He wrote some twenty-five novels. "The Moonstone" appeared in 1868, eight years after his famous "The Woman in White." Here is a brief indication of the plot.

★

IN the storming of Seringapatam in India, in the year 1799, John Herncastle, a violent and cruel man, stole the sacred Hindu diamond called the Moonstone. The jewel had been taken years before from the forehead of the Moon-God in its Brahmin shrine, and Herncastle's theft was only one of a series. Since the first theft of the stone, three faithful Hindus have followed its trail, sworn to recover the gem and return it to the statue of the Moon-God.

Herncastle took the gem to England and kept it in a bank vault. He saved himself from murder by letting the Hindus know that if he were killed the stone would be cut up into smaller gems, thus losing its sacred identity.

Herncastle left the jewel to his niece, Rachel Verinder. The stone was to be presented to Rachel on her birthday. After her uncle's death, young Franklin Blake, Lady Verinder's nephew, is asked by Herncastle's lawyer to take the gift to his cousin.

Franklin takes the stone to his cousin's country house and barely misses death at the hands of the Hindus before reaching his destination. On the advice of Gabriel Betteredge, the Verinders' old family servant, Franklin puts the gem in the vault of a bank nearby until the birthday arrives, as the Hindus have been seen in the neighbourhood about three weeks before.

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Franklin and Rachel fall in love, and even the appearance of handsome Godfrey Ablewhite, a skilled organiser for charity, fails to weaken Rachel's affection. Godfrey has been asked to attend the birthday celebration, together with a number of guests, including Dr. Candy, the town physician, and Mr. Bruff, the family lawyer.

While the guests at the birthday dinner are admiring the beauty of the jewel, they hear the beating of a drum on the terrace. Three Hindus have appeared, disguised as jugglers. One of the guests is Mr. Murthwaite, a famous traveller in the Orient, and at a sharply spoken word from him the Indians retreat.

Watch-dogs are released to protect the house that night. There is no disturbance to alarm the household, however, and everyone thinks all has gone well, until Rachel announces that the jewel has disappeared from her dressing-room.

In spite of Rachel's protests, Franklin Blake insists the police be called in. The Hindus are arrested and put in jail, but to the astonishment of everyone they are able to prove an alibi for the entire night.

Little about the crime is discovered, until Sergeant Cuff of Scotland Yard arrives. He decides that some fresh paint from the door in Rachel's dressing-room must have come off on someone's clothes. Rachel, for some unknown reason, refuses to allow a search for the stained clothing.

Sergeant Cuff suspects that Rachel has staged the theft herself, and her actions seem to substantiate his theory. He also thinks that Rosanna Spearman, a maid with a criminal record, was a party to the plot, for he learns that Rosanna made a new nightdress shortly after the theft. Sergeant Cuff supposes that it is to take the place of another which has been stained.

Because the Verinders oppose his efforts, he drops the case. The only other clue he has is that Rosanna may have hidden something in the rocks by the seashore. He suspects that it was the stained nightdress.

Rosanna commits suicide soon afterwards by throwing herself into a pool of quicksand. Betteredge discovers she has left a letter for Franklin, but he is already abroad by the time it is found.

Rachel goes to London with her mother, and in time becomes engaged to Godfrey Ablewhite. When Mr. Bruff tells her that Godfrey had secretly learned the terms of her mother's will before asking for her hand, Rachel breaks off the engagement.

Franklin returns to England later in the year and goes to visit Betteredge, who tells him about Rosanna's letter. Franklin gets the letter and learns from it that she thought him guilty of the crime.

The letter also gives him directions for recovering a box which, as Sergeant Cuff had thought, she has buried by the sea.

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The box proves to have the stained nightgear in it, but it is not Rosanna's. On the contrary, it is Franklin's!

Unable to account for this strange fact, Franklin returns to London, where he has a long talk with Mr. Bruff about the case. Mr. Bruff informs Franklin that the Moonstone must be in a certain bank in London, deposited there by a notorious pawnbroker named Luker. A mysterious attack upon the money-lender seems to confirm this belief.

Franklin tells Mr. Bruff of the strange discovery of the nightshirt. Mr. Bruff plans a surprise meeting between Franklin and Rachel, at which Franklin learns that Rachel had actually seen him come into the room and steal the stone. Because she loves him she has refused to let the investigation go on. Franklin tries to convince her he has no memory of the deed.

On Mr. Bruff's advice, Franklin returns to the country house and tries to discover what happened to him that night. From Dr. Candy's assistant, Ezra Jennings, he learns that the doctor had secretly given him a dose of laudanum on the night of the theft, so that Franklin, suffering from insomnia, would get a good night's sleep.

Jennings suggests administering a like dose to Franklin again, in the same setting, to see what he will do. Mr. Bruff and Rachel come down from London to watch the experiment.

With the help of Betteredge the scene is set and Franklin given the laudanum. Under its influence he repeats his actions on the night of the theft. Rachel watches him come to her room and take out a substitute stone.

She is now convinced that his original act was an attempt to protect her from the Hindus by removing the stone to another room. Before Franklin can recollect what he did with the stone after he left Rachel's room, however, the drug takes full effect and he falls sound asleep.

The experiment explains how the stone disappeared from Rachel's room, but not how it got into a London bank through the hands of Luker. Mr. Bruff suggests that the gem may shortly be redeemed from Luker. Sergeant Cuff is called back into the case, and a watch set on the bank.

One day Luker comes into the bank and claims the stone. On his way out he can have passed it to any of three people. All three men are followed. Two prove to be innocent citizens. Bruff's office boy trails the third, a bearded man who looks like a sailor, to an inn where the suspect takes lodgings for the night.

When Franklin and Sergeant Cuff arrive at the inn, they find the sailor dead and the box from the bank empty. Sergeant Cuff

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examines the dead man closely and then tears away a wig and false beard to expose the features of Godfrey Ablewhite.

From Luker they learn that Godfrey had seen Franklin go into Rachel's room on the night of the robbery, and that Franklin had given Godfrey the stone with instructions to put it in the bank. Since Franklin had remembered nothing of this request the next day, Godfrey kept the jewel.

The mystery solved, Rachel and Franklin are happily reunited.

Several years later Mr. Murthwaite, the explorer, describes to them a festival in honour of the Moon-God which he has witnessed in India. When the idol was unveiled, he saw gleaming in the forehead of the stone image the long-lost treasure of the god—the sacred Moonstone.

* * *

MENAGERIE

In this private zoo are some strange creatures awaiting identification! Allow yourself one point for recognising the animal and one point each for the source and the author, making a possible total of twenty-four. The answers are on page 111.

1. *His 'satiable curtiosity which was a constant source of irritation to his relations proved of great advantage to his species.*
2. *"In what distant deeps or skies*
   Burnt the fire of thine eyes?"
3. *Her first rule was when in doubt, wash, and she educated her protegé, Peter, in the ways of her kind by numerous references to this precept.*
4. *A false flatterer and "ful of sly iniquitee," but he opened his mouth once too often!*
5. *"There she blows," cried the Captain, at last catching sight of the monster which had devoured his leg. But only one man lived to tell the tale of their encounter.*
6. *His appearance was cause enough for alarm; something was making him tick.*
7. *The devil's walking parody indeed, yet he also had his hour.*
8. *He was of such a lovely red-gold colour, and in his big black eyes there was a lurking afterthought which made Lady Carrington want to buy him.*

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GIPSY QUEST

Always his eyes went searching, right and left, along the busy pavements

by JIM PHELAN

NOW I'll tell you about Two-Water Smith, a young Romany chap who'd never slept a night in a house until he was twenty-five. Although he was born, and lived, less than thirty miles from the centre of London.

Living on the road, a fellow learns to use his eyes and ears as a forest animal does. More so, and a good deal more so, if he travels the roads anywhere near the big cities.

For instance, you may talk with a Romany boy for ten seconds, asking him what time the bus goes to Birmingham or wherever it is. Then, if you meet that chap a month later, and show you're friendly, he'll be able to tell you bits about how you looked that morning, the last time he saw you.

He'll tell you that the nail on the little finger of your left hand was broken, that one of your shoe-laces had its tag trodden on, that you were smoking one brand of cigarette but had another kind in your pocket, that you had a little wheeze to your breath because you had a cold that day, that the second button on your jacket had been sewn on with grey thread instead of brown, and that you'd been seeing a different girl, more or less closely, since the morning he spoke with you. Little things like that.

Weasels and wildcats have to use their eyes that way too.

Now, that was the kind of sharp-eyed youngster Two-Water Smith was, although he lived nearer to the big city than many who worked in it. This is really a story about his wild-animal alertness, and the way he used it when he set out to find a girl.

A slim, wiry, good-looking, black-faced young fellow, coming twenty-five, his name on the road was Plungro Lem. But among his own people he was called after the village near which he was born, a little place at the junction of small rivers, called Two Waters.

That was to separate him from Chipperfield Smith, and Redbourn Smith, people of the same family. So he was always Two-Water Smith.

Living near civilized places, he had to be even quicker on the

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uptake, quicker on the come and go, than a Romany chap whose rake of waggons make their wend on a Yorkshire moor, for instance. Sometimes there would be a sour village constable, who didn't like the Romany, and who'd look a promising pitch over at nightfall —to make sure there were no thieving gipsies about.

Then ten minutes after that village constable had gone home satisfied, the waggon of Two-Water Smith would pull out from some track in the woods, and haul into that same pitch, certain of being unmolested there of all places. And ten minutes before the constable came next afternoon, Two-Water would be off, headed for some other sharp village policeman, ten or twelve miles away.

That's how a Romany boy has to live, if he keeps too near the big cities. But Two-Water always got on well.

Then one day the Smith caravan was halted by a rich, good-humoured gentleman, up on the Hemel Hempstead road. There was a bit of talk, and the rich man wanted Two-Water Smith, with his horse and waggon, to make use of them in a film called *Vagabond Cavalry*, about gipsies. Two-Water took on to do it, and started right away for the film studios, on the edge of London.

They fixed him up to stay at a nice hotel near the studios, and he was to stay there until the film was finished. So he was like a real gorgio, a city man, getting up each morning and hurrying off to work. Of course he enjoyed himself every minute of the time, there were so many strange things to see and smell and hear, up and down London.

Now gorgio people and Romany people don't mix a lot, everyone knows that. But one evening, coming out from the main gate of the film studios, Two-Water met a girl going in. They swopped eyes, and in one second, Two-Water knew that girl should be his mort, gorgia or no gorgia.

He darted back into the studio entrance again, but of course the office gorgio stopped him. That was because you need a pass for every time you go in, and Two-Water's pass for that day had already been given up.

So Two-Water waited outside, for maybe five hours, until the place was all locked up for the night, but the girl never came out. Then next day young Smith found that there were several entrances, so he set out to find the girl again.

First he went to the office gorgio who had stopped him, and asked about the girl, but the man gave him no help, since girls by the hundred, or maybe by the thousand, came in and out of that gate. Then Two-Water went away, and walked up and down the streets of London for hours, but found no tracks.

No one is to think this would be like a simple village boy, looking for one girl among millions and millions of people. Two-Water

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was looking for something that was a track, but didn't find it, so he walked the streets again every hour he was free.

Then the film was nearly finished, and Two-Water had more time to walk about. Always his eyes went questing, right and left, right and left, along the busy pavements. He was looking for someone carrying the same kind of leather box he had seen with the girl at the studio, and at last he saw such a box, carried by a girl getting off a bus.

"If I tell you a civil question, madam," says Two-Water to the girl, "will you say me a civil answer?"

The girl looked at him and smiled, girls never finding it hard to smile at Two-Water Smith. "Certainly," she said. "If it's not too—well, certainly. What is it?"

"You have a dark green leather box, with a slanting top and a handle, weighing maybe sixteen pounds, and never kept out of doors," said Two-Water. "What is that box, madam?"

"You mean this?" said the girl, holding it up. "This is a portable typewriter."

"Could you tell me," asked Two-Water, "what kind of girl would carry one of those portable typewriters? I mean, madam, what would she do for a living? What do *you* do, if I may tell you a civil question?"

The girl smiled again. "Of course you may," she answered. "I'm a secretary in the City. Let me see," she went on, and thought for a moment. "Girls who'd carry portables might be secretaries, or typists from an agency, or writers, or journalists out on a job. That's all, I think."

"Your husband will be hated by all his men-friends," said Two-Water Smith. "May I give you good luck for your civil speeches?"

He went off, repeating the words the girl had used. Next morning he went out to the film studios, and confronted the office gorgio at the main gate.

"If a man was to tell you a civil question," he commenced, "would you say him a civil answer?"

"What's your business?" snapped the man. "I'm not here to answer questions."

Two-Water smiled, and licked his lips a bit. "If a man," he said pleasantly, "was to kick you in the middle, kind of hard, and then jump on your face, and gouge the two eyes out of your head before you hit the ground, and *then* offer to fight you fair, would he get a civil speech to his civil question, brother?"

The office gorgio looked at the wicked, thin face of him, and went green, he being perhaps forty pounds heavier than Two-Water and some five inches taller. He licked his lips too, but differently.

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"I didn't understand," he muttered. "What was the question, sir?"

He and Two-Water got on very well after that, and the office gorgio helped all he could. Only it wasn't a lot in the end.

But they did work out that a secretary or typist from outside wouldn't have business in more than four or five of the offices. Also that a girl-writer on her own would be calling at only two or three rooms, and also that there hadn't been any journalist-girl in on the day Two-Water mentioned.

It wasn't a lot, but it was something. So young Smith set out to track down all the places where secretaries or typists or writers might have called. That wasn't very difficult, because he was dealing with a quick, nice type of girl at each office, and girls always liked Two-Water Smith.

It must have been funny, for the people who worked in the big block of offices attached to the studios, to see Two-Water trailing up the corridors and through the doors, for all the world as if he were tracking a lost horse on Dunstable Downs. But he got on all right with the secretaries.

"A girl of just your own height I am seeking," he told one secretary, after he had made her stand up and have his eyes run over her. "Just your height, and might be half a pound heavier. Dark brown eyes, and her arms would be muscular. Upstanding, with the weight on the front of her feet, and maybe a finger-thickness more across the shoulders than yourself. Her—"

He stopped, for the girl was spluttering with laughter. Then he grinned when he saw she meant to be friendly.

"Don't be a half-wit!" she told him. "What way is that to describe one girl to another? What you have to look out for is things about her clothes, her lipstick and perfume, what kind of shoes and stockings and so on. *Then* any girl will be able to answer your questions, but not with your talk about height and weight, as if you were describing a horse."

"Your husband will be a lucky man," said Two-Water Smith. "And all his girl-friends will want to poison you. Now I will give you good luck and thanks. For my eyes saw all the things you mention—but I did not know what questions to ask. *Now*—"

And in he started, with a description of the missing girl's clothes, and stockings, and perfume, and shoes, that made the office-secretary stare. Long before he had finished she was nodding confirmation.

"Why, ye-es," she said slowly. "You must be right. What was that you said about the glove?"

"A light leather glove," repeated Two-Water at once. "It might be kid-goat, but my guess is the skin of a hare. The colour

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of the top of a jar of milk after standing all night. Second left finger with a tiny stain of cigarettes—a thin black kind of cigarettes. The smallest bit of lip-stick on the first finger of the glove, on the outside near the tip."

"Yes," said the secretary girl without any more hesitation. "Wait a minute." She searched back through an appointment book. "Here we are. Miss Miriam Lee. Called on Mr. Gronleigh last Thursday afternoon."

Two-Water thanked her and went out. There was no great difficulty about his getting a minute with Gronleigh, one of the heads, who already knew the young waggon-man by sight.

The girl was not an employee of his, nor did he know her, she being merely the secretary of a man with whom the company had business. But he was able to give Smith the man's name and address, and Two-Water hurried across London, to the office of Mr. Theodore Carlow.

Carlow, a genial, fat man, made the strange-looking visitor welcome, and after a few minutes' gossip asked what he could do. A moment later, regretfully, he said no, there was no Miss Lee a secretary there. Two-Water stared, and drew a long breath.

"Brown eyes," he explained patiently. "Muscular arms, and a way of standing on her toes. Lip-stick on one finger of a glove—you wouldn't know that part. Smokes thin black cigarettes; you'd know *that*. Uses a perfume that is clove-pink with a touch of lily-valley; you'd know that. Has a portable typewriter in a dark green leather box with four little rubber feet—you'd know that. By name Lee."

Carlow smiled at his eagerness, and reached to press a button on his desk. Then the door opened and a girl came in.

She was the right height, and brought a portable typewriter with her, and her eyes were brownish. But she never looked at Two-Water, only waited to see what Carlow required.

"This is Miss Watson, my secretary," Carlow explained. "I have no other secretary or typist." He waved to the girl and she went out; then he turned to Two-Water again.

"Is there anything else, Mr. Smith?" he inquired. "Any time I can help you—"

"That's *now*," stated Two-Water Smith. "Who smokes the little black cigarettes in this office?"

"No one," Carlow told him smilingly, and pulled out a cigar-case. "I think Miss Watson smokes Virginians. No one uses black cigarettes."

"You're a liar," said Two-Water quietly. "Who'd put down a typewriter with four little rubber feet, just *there*?" He jabbed a hand at a place near Carlow's desk.

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"No one," said Carlow quickly. "I mean—Miss Watson, surely."

"You're a liar," said Smith again. "For hers is full half an inch narrower. Furthermore, gorgio man," he went on, and his voice was purring dangerously, "who'd use a scent of clove-pink with a touch of lily-valley?" Carlow laughed a big laugh of relief.

"Wrong, gipsy man," he grinned. "No one here has ever used that perfume. Not for—"

"Not since last Thursday evening," said Smith. "Now I will tell you a small story about my grandfather."

Carlow gaped, at the sudden change in the conversation. Then after a laugh, he relaxed and leant back in his chair.

"Do, please," he invited. "I am always interested in—"

"This grandfather of mine," said Two-Water, "was called Chipperfield Smith, and he was a bush-ranger in Australia."

Carlow did not look quite so comfortable. But he managed to smile, and waited.

"The blacks," went on Two-Water, "raped and murdered a girl Chip Smith was loving, and Chip caught the man that did it."

Carlow lit a cigar, and his hand shook a little.

"He punched the black with his fists," said Smith, "until he was weary. Then Chip went to bed, after he'd chained the black to a post. Next morning he flogged that black with a lizard-skin, until he was a single wound from heel to neck. And then—"

The Romany paused, while Carlow leant forward, his fat face pale, watching the lean, brown man with painful intensity. Two-Water Smith rolled himself a thin black cigarette, and blew a cloud of smoke. Then he stood up slowly, and an instant later there was an open jack-knife in his hand.

Carlow's hand shot out towards the bell-push on the desk, but like a flash the menacing point of the jack-knife came down grazing his thumb. Then Smith's first and second fingers, forked, were at the other's eyes, and the stout man quivered in terror.

"Speak up!" ordered Two-Water.

Carlow was gabbling the story almost as soon as the other's last word was out. It was an ordinary story, according to him. Miriam Lee had been his secretary. He had made a pass or two, as he put it. Smith would understand. A pass or two.

"Pull ahead," ordered Smith grimly, and Carlow hurried on.

On Thursday Miriam Lee had returned from a job at the film studios. As she was leaving, Carlow had "made a pass at her in the ordinary way," but she had repulsed him angrily. That, he pleaded apologetically, had worked him up, and he had grabbed the girl, and kissed her roughly. The fat man stopped suddenly, and gaped in terror at the wicked, weasel-like face before him.

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"Pull ahead sharp," hissed Two-Water. "What did you do?"

"*Me*?" Carlow almost screamed. "What did *I* do? The bitch jabbed a knee in me—here—and forked her fingers at my eyes, the same as you did, and—"

He stared. Two-Water Smith was choking with laughter, as he jerked away the knife, and Carlow dabbed a handkerchief on his hand.

"Pull ahead," spluttered Smith, between laughs.

Carlow had punished the girl in the only way he knew, by dismissing her without notice. Surely, as between men, Mr. Smith would understand that a pass or two—

"The address," cut in Two-Water curtly. Carlow furnished it, and sagged in gasping relief as his lean, dark visitor left.

Two-Water hurried to the Bloomsbury address, and found the brown-eyed girl making tea in an upstairs room. She didn't seem very surprised by his call.

"Oh, it's you," she remarked in a casual tone. "I rather thought you'd be round."

They talked, and in one minute it came out that she was of Romany descent. They laughed, about poor fat Carlow's fear of the lamp-fork, the gipsy-girl's defence that Miriam had learnt from her lean, brown grandmother.

"But by the way," Miriam asked. "How did you find me?"

"Oh well," said Two-Water Smith modestly, "you know—a fellow learns to use his eyes a bit, on the road. Now, this caravan of mine . . ."

* * *

ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD

You will find, on page 144, Argosy's second Prize Crossword Competition in which there will be one-guinea book tokens for the first three correct solutions checked on the closing date. When you have completed the crossword puzzle *in ink*, please write your name and address in capital letters in the space below the square and cut out together the square and attached coupon. Post your entry to: ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD (No. 2), 3, Pilgrim Street, London, E.C.4. (Comp.) to arrive not later than Thursday, July 9, the closing date.

We regret that entry must be limited to readers living in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands and Eire. There is no entry fee and the Editor's decision is final.

Names of the prize-winners in this competition and the solution will appear in the issue of Argosy on sale Sept. 10.

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IF WISHES WERE HORSES

Thou shalt make castels thenne in Spayne . . .

GEOFFREY CHAUCER, *The Romaunt of the Rose*

I shall buy me a sampan shaped like a slipper
With eyes on either side of the prow,
And hoist a sail all ruddy-golden
For the Spice Isles now.

There will be nine Chinamen upon her
With naked backs, like the sail red-gold,
And silks and ivory and jade and amber
Will fill the hold.

I shall sail forever between green islands
While under her poop the wake will grow—
A ripple across the copper waters
In the tropic glow.

ELIZABETH COATSWORTH, *Fox Footprints*

Magic Casements

While there is still any life left in our bones we most of us at least desire to live vividly and variously, if not dangerously . . . We pine for the curious, the bizarre . . .

It may be observed, however, that what to a secure onlooker is a pleasingly romantic situation may be grim matter-of-fact to those actually engaged in it. To be besieged with Helen in Troy; to be congealed amid the icy wastes of the Arctic, or lost in the Sahara; to be a royal fugitive in an oak tree, a Colonel Lawrence in Mecca, a Charles Doughty in the sandy wilds of Arabia, a Mallory on the ultimate peak of Everest; all these are probably more *romantic* situations to contemplate than to share . . .

Strangely enough, too, gregarious by instinct though we humans are, and though two in a garden may make a paradise of the everywhere: a complete solitude, also, may be saturated with the romantic . . .

An island let it be, say, three or four hundred to a thousand miles

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or so from the nearest habitations of humanity and well out of the usual sea-trade routes, preferably uncharted, fairly commodious, say thirteen miles by four, of a climate whose extremes are not of a pitiless severity, an island which Nature's bounty has endowed with shade, fresh water, shelter and food fit for human consumption. And there—our recluse.

Every seaman, every wanderer on the deep, has hearkened to the decoy of that ideal island; and where is the landsman with soul so dead—even though his eye has been lifted over no greater expanse of salt water than can be scanned from the steps of a bathing-machine—who in his homesick moments has never caught its enchanting echo? The English in particular are as a people naturally beguiled by thought of the smallest strip or patch of land that is surrounded by water . . . The seas are in their blood. They have been scoffed at as a nation of shopkeepers; "merchant adventurers" has a pleasanter sound. They have been eyed askance as a horde of money-hunting land-grabbers; freeborn crusading colonists is a pleasanter way of putting it . . .

Man's longed-for havens indeed are for the most part curiously simple in structure . . . It is not the gemlike gates of Jerusalem but what they are the symbols of that will bring him peace in the blissful plains of Paradise, where there will be no more sea and therefore no more islands. Meanwhile he may cheat himself with the pretty illusion that if only he could secure a modest freehold of *terra firma* surrounded by water he would be at peace.

WALTER DE LA MARE, *Desert Islands*

Trumpet Voluntary

I wish I were a
Elephantiaphus
And could pick off the coconuts with my nose
But, oh! I am not,
(Alas! I cannot be)
An Elephanti—
Elephantiaphus.

Author Unknown

If . . .

Johnson strongly expressed his love of driving fast in a post-chaise. "If (said he) I had no duties, and no reference to futurity, I would spend my life in driving briskly in a post-chaise with a pretty woman."

JAMES BOSWELL, *Life of Samuel Johnson*

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To Still My Longing

Oh, my God, to still my longing,
Give to me a mantle fine,
Garnished all with buttons bright,
In the golden light to shine.

Grant to me a goodly wife,
In her jacket pure and neat,
With willow-like arms,
And flower-like feet.

Her two shoulders like white bread ;
Her eyes in shape like seed of grape ;
And her two lips
Like blossoms red.

Transylvanian Gypsy Song, Translated by W. E. A. Axon

Pirate Chief

Seriously, do you like to repose ? Ye gods, I hate it . . . And when a man, seemingly sane, tells me he has "fallen in love with stagnation," I can only say to him, "You will never be a Pirate!" . . . After all boyhood's aspirations and youth's immoral day-dreams, you are condemned to sit down, grossly draw in your chair to the fat board, and be a beastly Burgess till you die . . .

To confess plainly, I had intended to spend my life (or any leisure I might have from Piracy upon the high seas) as the leader of a great horde of irregular cavalry, devastating whole valleys. I can still, looking back, see myself in many favourite attitudes ; signalling for a boat from my pirate ship with a pocket-handkerchief, I at the jetty end, and one or two of my bold blades keeping the crowd at bay ; or else turning in the saddle to look back at my whole command (some five thousand strong) following me at the hand-gallop up the road out of the burning valley : this last by moonlight . . .

Robert Louis Stevenson, *in a letter to Cosmo Monkhouse, March* 16, 1884

Down To Earth

It is a fine world and I wish I knew how to make £200 a year in it.

Edward Thomas *to Gordon Bottomley, June*, 1915

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★*In his great epic, "The Lusiads," the Portuguese poet, Camoens, describes the hazardous voyage of Vasco da Gama to Africa and the Orient. Now the rigours of the expedition are over, and the triumphant mariners enjoy their reward.*

ISLE OF DELIGHT

translated by

WILLIAM C. ATKINSON

THE fortunate vessels set their prows once more for that southern outpost of Nature, the Cape of Good Hope. Once more, timorous-glad, they faced the grim terrors of the uncertain ocean. But this time they were Lisbon-bound, with joyous tidings and news of the East; and there was not a man among them who did not dwell, as on a joy so perfect that his heart could ill contain it, on the pleasure of seeing once again his beloved Portugal and his so cherished home and dear ones, of recounting his rare peregrinations across the seas and the divers climes and peoples he had seen, and of achieving at last the merited reward for all his far-flung trials and tribulations.

It was many a long year since Venus, appointed by Jupiter to be the good genius of the Portuguese, had first bestowed on them her special favour and guidance. Just now, anxious to gladden the dreary monotony of the voyage, she was busy devising some compensation for all the perils so manfully endured, some crowning tribute to their so arduous achievement. Recapitulating in her mind the vast expanse of ocean over which they had sailed and all the toils that Bacchus had strewn in their path, she resolved on a project she had long been toying with in fancy as fitting requital.

This was to find them some haven of leisure and delight in that watery domain, some retreat where her mariners might refresh their weary humanity, a respite from the labours that consume man's brief existence. Sensibly she decided to inform her son Cupid, since it was through him she had it in her power to bring gods down to earth and to raise mere mortals to the skies.

Having thought it all over, she decided to prepare for them, there in mid-ocean, a magic island beauteous with flowers and verdure, one of many she had dotted over the open seas in addition to those in the Mediterranean that owned her sovereign sway. There she

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would have the loveliest of the ocean nymphs await the brave fellows, to enchant their eyes and vanquish their hearts with their singing and dancing; for she was proposing to work secretly on the nymphs' affections and predispose each to a readier will to please whichever of the Portuguese should catch her fancy.

And so she went in search of Cupid, without whose aid she was powerless in these matters. Harnessing the doves and swans to her chariot, she set out, the air filled with the lascivious kisses her gentle steeds kept throwing to one another. Where her course lay the wind was calmed, and only the graceful motion of her passage disturbed the air.

Soon she was over the hills of Cyprus, where her archer son was then engaged in marshalling a force of lesser Cupids for a major expedition against rebellious mankind, that had lately lapsed into serious error through giving its heart to things meant to be used, not to be loved.

Now the swans were bringing the dainty chariot gently to rest on the green sward, and Venus, her cheeks like roses framed in snow, was quick to alight. Cupid greeted her joyously, and all his minions hastened to kiss the hand of the goddess of love.

She wasted no time. Throwing her arms around her son, she addressed him confidently. "My dear boy," she said, "on whom, now as always, all my powers depend, you were ever fearless, even against the bolts of Jupiter, and I want your help now for a very special purpose.

"You know that I have long had a particular care for the Portuguese—my friends the Fates told me of their worship and esteem for me—and you are well aware of all they have been going through of late.

"On that same ocean, that they have always found a source of dread, I want them now to find repose and to enjoy some measure of reward and glory for their immortal labours.

"My idea, now that they are on their way home after discovering a new world, is that the Nereids down in their watery depths should be smitten and inflamed with love for them, and should come up and await them on an island I am getting ready in the midst of the waves, which I am bedecking with all the gifts that Flora and Zephyr between them can bestow."

So Venus proposed, and her wayward son prepared at once to obey. He called for his bow of precious ivory and tipped his arrows with gold. Venus made room for him in her chariot, a note of wanton satisfaction in her gesture, then, loosening rein, gave the swans their head.

Cupid remarked that he would need the services of a certain notorious go-between, one who had worked against him, it was true,

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many a time, but who, again, had often helped him in his designs. This was Fame, the bold and boastful giant-goddess, the speaker both of falsehood and of truth, with a hundred eyes to see and a thousand mouths to tell abroad, in her rovings, all she saw.

They went to find her, and sent her on ahead to sing with trumpet-notes the seafarers' praises, charging her to pitch these higher than those of any she had ever praised before. This she did, and her report rippled its way to the caverns of the deep and there spread far and wide. What the goddess spoke this time was true, and was accepted as true, for she had taken Credulity along with her.

With this, Cupid let fly his arrows one by one, until the sea groaned under the impact. Some went straight through the restless waves, others described a more circuitous course. All found their mark, and the nymphs began to utter most ardent sighs, that welled from the secret depths of their being. Each one was smitten, though none had yet seen the face of him she loved; for the ear in these matters is as vulnerable as the eye.

The indomitable youth then drew bow once again, more vigorously this time than ever, for on Tethys, who was ever the most hostile to the Portuguese, he wanted to inflict the deepest wound of all.

And now his quiver was empty, nor was there left in all the ocean a nymph alive. Wounded, indeed, they still drew breath, but only to the extent of realizing that the wound was fatal.

But let the surging billows make way, for look, Venus has seen to the remedy: riding the blue sea, the bellying white sails come into view. Now ardent love can make reciprocal answer to the passion that fires the maiden hearts, provided, that is, that native modesty show a due deference to Venus's every behest.

Led by Venus herself, the whole beauteous company of the Nereids had already set out for the island, engaging as they went in the choral dances that were their custom. Once there, the lovely goddess told them of her own behaviour on the innumerable occasions when she fell in love; and they, now completely in thrall to the gentle emotion, hung on her every word.

The fleet continued to forge its way across the mighty deep, the beloved homeland ever its goal. It was on the look-out now for a spot where it could take in fresh water for the long voyage still ahead, when with sudden joy, just as dawn was breaking gently overhead, the ships all spotted together the Isle of Love.

They were still far off when they saw it in all its freshness and beauty. Venus was wafting it over the waves towards them, as a white sail is wafted by the breeze, to ensure that they should not pass by without making harbour, this being her design and she being,

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after all, all-powerful. As soon as she saw that the sailors had spied it and were heading that way, she made it fast and firm.

The prows were cleaving the sea towards a tranquil, curving bay with its glistening strand that Venus had dotted with rosy shells. From the island, all joy and charm and loveliness, there rose three comely hills, their noble grace adorned with luxuriant vegetation. Limpid streams flowed from their summits, murmuring as they rippled over white pebbly beds : hence the lushness of the verdure.

There was no counting the trees as they soared skywards, all laden with fragrant, luscious fruit. There were orange trees, their crop the colour of Daphne's golden tresses, citron trees weighted until they seemed to be leaning on the ground for support for their yellow burden, while the air was redolent with the odour of delicately moulded lemons, like a maiden's breasts.

Nor was any gift there wanting of all Pomona gives, Nature producing them in their infinite variety without need of cultivation, and far superior in consequence : purple cherries, mulberries, whose Portuguese name, *amoras*, is so close kin to love, the peaches first found in Persia and so greatly improved when grown elsewhere. The bursting pomegranate shone with a redness to outvie the ruby. Jocund vine was interwoven with spreading elm, the grapes hanging in clusters of dark purple and green ; and so mightily did the pear tree flourish that its laden boughs, like pyramids, constrained it to welcome the depredations of the birds.

As for the flowery sward that carpeted the rustic scene, making the shady valley more charming still, its delicate beauty robbed Persia's tapestries of their sheen. The narcissus drooped its head over the clear, motionless pool, and all around grew anemones, telling of that Adonis for love of whom Venus had not yet ceased to pine. With the same colours adorning field and sky, it was in fact hard to tell if it was the flowers that gave the lovely dawn its hues, or the dawn the flowers.

Such, as these new Argonauts came ashore from their ships, was the cool and charming scene that met their gaze. The lovely goddesses meantime were strolling about the glade as though all unaware. Some were playing sweet music on the zither, some on harp or sonorous flute. Others with golden bow made faint pretence of hunting. It was thus their expert instructress had counselled, that they should scatter over the fields and begin by awakening desire in the mariners with the fleeting view of an uncertain prize. Some, trusting to the beauty unadorned of a lovely form, had laid aside the enhancement of attire and were bathing naked.

The stalwart Portuguese, eager to be touching land once more, were now hastening up the beach, not a man of them remaining behind. One attraction was the pleasures of the chase : little did

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they think that among those enchanting hills there was hunting to be had, without snare or net, as gentle, tame, and accommodating as Venus had there disposed for them.

A number, armed with musket and cross-bow, made resolutely for the sombre thickets and glades in search of deer. Others, drawn by the shade that protected from the noonday sun, walked by the banks of streams, tripping lightly over their pebbly beds down to the shore.

Then, suddenly, they began to glimpse among the leafy branches a variety of colourings that their eyes persuaded them were, not flowers, but delicate, many-hued fabrics of wool and silk such as human beings, themselves beautiful as the rose, will wear to make their beauty rarer still and incite yet more potently to love.

Veloso in his astonishment gave a great shout. "Men," he called, "what strange game have we here? If it be possible that the ancient pagan cults still persist, this is a glade sacred to the nymphs and we have stumbled on something beyond man's farthest desire. It is obvious that there are greater and more excellent things to be discovered in the world than we unthinking mortals dream of. Let us follow these goddesses and find out if they be real, or only creatures of the imagination." And with that they all set off, swifter than any deer, and gave chase along the banks.

The nymphs fled through the foliage; but, more cunning than swift, little by little and with many a smile and cry they allowed the hounds to overtake them. As they ran, the breeze caught up now one's golden tresses, now another's delicate drapery, and desire, battening on the sudden glimpse of lovely flesh, grew more ardent still. One stumbled, by design, and her show was rather of complacency than indignation when, as she picked herself up again, her pursuer fell over her and made escape impossible.

Some of his fellows, taking another direction, came upon the nymphs who were bathing naked and drew from them a startled cry, as though such an invasion were the last thing they looked for. Several, feigning a lesser esteem for modesty than for action, rushed as they were into the bush, granting to their pursuers' gaze what they denied their hands. One did, indeed, invoke a more comely maidenly reserve and, swifter even than Diana once in similar case, let the water cover her body; while another snatched hastily at her clothing on the bank.

There was one youth who dashed into the water fully dressed and booted as he ran, there to quench the fire that consumed him. Wary and astute, and accustomed to fetching the wounded bird out of the water, the huntsman's dog no sooner sees his master raise the musket to his cheek to aim at duck or heron than he leaps impatiently in, not waiting for the report, and, confident the bird will fall, swims

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after it barking. Just so did he make after his nymph, and found in her no chaste Diana.

Lionardo Ribeiro was a soldier of pleasing presence, resourceful, a good horseman, and ever disposed to fall in love. Love in truth had dealt him not one but many a rebuff, ill-treating him so consistently as to bring him to the firm conviction that in affairs of the heart he had no luck. He had never wholly abandoned hope, notwithstanding, that even yet his fate might change.

He, as chance would have it, had singled out Ephyre, a very paragon of comeliness, but who was determined to sell more dearly than the others what Nature had given her to give; and now, exhausted with the pursuit, he called to her:

"You have vanquished me, you lovely creature, too lovely to be so cruel. But if you are carrying off my soul, you might as well wait for the body. All the others have tired of running and have given themselves up to the enemy's sweet pleasure.

"It is in vain hope only that I keep on pursuing you, that either you may give way under the burden, or by virtue of your lovely face I may be rescued from my present grim and miserable fate. And if the change is to befall, gentle maiden, do not keep on running away from me; for Love will aim his dart at you, and if he strike, then you must await me. And if you wait, I have nothing more to ask."

If the lovely nymph still ran on it was not now, as before, to make her downcast pursuer pay dearly for his prize, but that she might still hear his sweet lament and love-lorn plaints. But now, with an expression of benign tenderness, she fell to the ground at her victor's feet, and all was forgotten in the ecstasy of love.

What hungry kisses and pretty weeping might then have been heard throughout the glade, what gentle caresses and becoming indignation, that turned straightway to merry, rippling laughter! What more took place those morning and noontide hours, with Venus ever fanning the flames of delight, is rather to be experienced than described.

And now the beauteous nymphs, in perfect harmony with their sailor-lovers, wove dainty chaplets of laurel and gold and a wealth of flowers to deck their brows. Then, bestowing their snow-white hands in marriage, they exchanged solemn, binding promises of such eternal comradeship, good faith, and happiness as should last through life and death.

Chief among all the nymphs was Tethys herself, reputed the daughter of Uranus and Vesta—and from her looks, that dazzled land and sea alike, one could well believe it. She gave her hand to the illustrious da Gama, an honour richly deserved. The act was celebrated with a seemly display of regal pomp, that revealed her as outstanding among the great of her sex.

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Explaining to him then who she was, she gave him to understand that she had come there at the bidding of immutable destiny to unfold to him, through the gift of prophecy, the remaining secrets of the sphere, both lands still untrodden and seas still unsailed, a revelation merited by Portugal alone.

Thereupon she took him by the hand and led him up to the crest of a lofty, sacred mountain where stood a palatial edifice, all finest crystal and purest gold. Here the company spent the day in gentle sports and pleasure unalloyed, the queen indulging her love within the palace, the other nymphs without, in shady nooks among the flowers.

And so the stalwarts and their fair brides passed the long hours to nightfall, radiant with a tender happiness they had never known before, that was compensation in full for all their arduous experiences. It is thus that life reserves to the latter end its reward for deeds of outstanding bravery and daring: only when fully earned can it carry with it resounding fame and a great and glorious name.

For Tethys, the so lovely ocean-nymphs, the magic island with its rich colourings, all are but symbols of the honours, delightful in themselves, that can make life sublime. The thrilling exaltation to the heights, the triumphs, the brow garlanded with palm and laurel, the glory and the wonder of it all, these are the island's joys.

* * *

ANSWERS to MENAGERIE on page 94

1. *The Elephant's Child in Rudyard Kipling's "Just So Stories."*
2. *The tiger in the poem of that title by William Blake.*
3. *Jennie, the stray tabby who mothered Peter, the little boy changed into a white cat, in "Jennie," by Paul Gallico.*
4. *Dan Russell, the fox, in the "Nonne Preestes Tale," by Geoffrey Chaucer. He opened his mouth and dropped Chanticleer.*
5. *The white whale, Moby Dick, in the novel of that title by Herman Melville. Captain Ahab was obsessed with the idea of killing it.*
6. *The crocodile who swallowed an alarm clock, in "Peter Pan," by J. M. Barrie.*
7. *The Donkey, in the poem of that title by G. K. Chesterton.*
8. *The bay stallion, St. Mawr, in the story of that title by D. H. Lawrence.*

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The Second Part of

SCHOOL FOR DANGER

by MICHAEL GILBERT

★

Casually, almost by accident, quiet and scholarly Mr. Wetherall, headmaster of the South Borough High School, finds himself caught in a web of strange coincidences. All kinds of questions force themselves into his mind, and he finds he can answer none of them.

Why should Luigi, proprietor of his favourite restaurant, regret having told him about the black marketeers who are ruining his business? Why does Sergeant Donovan, brother of his secretary Peggy, refuse to tell the police who smashed up his home and murdered his pretty wife? Why, when he goes to tell Peter Crowdy, one of his pupils, that he has found him a good job, does his father throw him out of the house for snooping? And why is the father found dead on the railway line very shortly after?

Sending the boy to safety, Mr. Wetherall reluctantly decides to explore the possible links in this odd chain of events. He visits Jock's Pull-In, and later the Double Four, a dubious Soho pub, owned by a strange character

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called Annie. All the while, a feeling that he is getting out of his depth and into greater and greater personal danger grows in him.

Later, at a night club, he knows he is being followed, and, now thoroughly alarmed, escapes through the back.

But the men who are after him understand the geography of Soho better than he does.

They are waiting for him in the street.

★

"JUST along here," said the red-faced man, as calmly as if nothing had happened since the last time he had spoken.

They turned into a short cul-de-sac between high buildings. The red-faced man held him by one arm, just above the elbow. The younger, black-haired man walked beside him, whistling very quietly, his hands in his pockets. As they turned into the cul-de-sac a lamp on the corner lit up his face. It was not a very good face, and Mr. Wetherall remembered where he had met it before. It was the man he had seen coming out of the telephone kiosk at the corner of Brinkman Road on the morning he had taken Peter Crowdy to Waterloo.

"Where are you taking me?" he asked suddenly.

"That depends on you," said the red-faced man. As usual he did the talking. "We don't want any trouble. It's people like you who make trouble."

"What is it you want?"

"A bit of information. Where have you put that boy?"

"Which boy?"

"Don't stall. Which boy? Which boy? Do you kidnap three a week?"

"Are you police officers?"

"That's right," said the red-faced man. "We're police officers. Now just answer the question."

"I don't believe—" began Mr. Wetherall.

It came from behind, a jolting blow of agonizing force and precision, into his side below the ribs and above the hip. He tried to turn, but the grip on his arm was too strong for him. He tried to speak, but his voice had gone.

"Better answer the question," said the red-faced man. "You

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don't want to upset Sailor. Once you upset him he gets excited. He likes doing it, you know."

Mr. Wetherall got his breath back.

"I can't tell you."

The second blow was on exactly the same spot and was harder. Mr. Wetherall felt a red-hot pain stabbing through the growing numbness. And again.

"St. Christopher's Home for Boys." The words seemed to be jerked out of him.

"Where's that?"

"At Woking."

"All right," said the red-faced man. As though it was a signal, something heavy caught Mr. Wetherall on the side of his head. At the same moment the grip on his elbow loosened, and he dropped forward onto his knees.

The black-haired man kicked him twice on the side of the head.

"That's enough," said the other man.

"I haven't started yet," said the black-haired man. It was the first time he had spoken. His voice was educated.

"I said that's enough."

The red-faced man leaned down and flicked the wallet out of Mr. Wetherall's inner pocket. Then with the same neat, studied movement, he took a flask out of his own pocket, unscrewed the lid, and emptied the contents down the front of Mr. Wetherall's coat.

He looked down at the crumpled figure on the pavement. Something seemed to be amusing him. "Looks as if he's had quite a party," he said.

The two of them walked away. As they went the black-haired man trod hard on the back of Mr. Wetherall's outstretched hand. Doing it seemed to cause him some sort of pleasure.

In the distance a woman began to scream.

It was this screaming that Mr. Wetherall noticed first. Then the warm salty taste of blood in his mouth and behind his nose. Then sickness. Then the hurt in his hand. Then the hurt in his side and back.

The woman had stopped screaming and was bending over him.

He had lost his glasses. He must find his glasses. He was helpless without them.

"Here they are," said the woman. "What a smell! You bin drinking?"

One of the lenses was cracked across, but the glass was all there. It was whilst he was putting them on that he first became aware of the state of his face. His right ear was numb, but felt enormous.

"I saw them," said the woman. "The brutes." Mr. Wetherall blinked up at her. She had a fat, good-natured, sketchily painted face.

"You ought to get home, you know," she went on. "You let a copper take one sniff at you and he'll run you in just as quick as he'll swear your character away next morning."

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Mr. Wetherall had not associated the smell of spirits with himself. He had imagined it came from the woman. Now he noticed his sodden, reeking shirt-front.

"Oh dear," he said. "Oh dear. What shall I do?"

"You ought to get a taxi and go off home."

"Yes. That's right." Home seemed infinitely desirable. "Would you be so kind—I wonder if you could find me one?"

"Oh, I'll find you one all right," said the woman. "Have you got any money to pay for it, that's the thing."

It was then that he discovered that his wallet was gone. The loss suddenly unnerved him completely. He started to shiver.

"Money gone too," said the woman. "Well, that's a fix and no mistake."

He forced his undamaged hand into his trouser pocket. There were a few coppers and some silver. He could hardly hold them for the shaking. "That won't get you far. Have you got a friend who could lend you some?"

Mr. Wetherall took hold of himself with an effort.

"Yes," he said. "If you can find me a taxi I shall be all right. Just as far as Fleet Street. Then I can borrow some more money—"

"All right," said the woman. "I won't be a minute. There's always a cab behind the Casino." She looked at him doubtfully. Mr. Wetherall had begun to shiver again.

"Hold on to yourself," she said. "I won't be a jiffy."

FLEET STREET

Alastair Todd was playing cards with two friends. He was in his office on the first floor of the chocolate-box building towards the south-east corner of Fleet Street that houses that great and justly celebrated daily newspaper the *Kite*.

He was a round, cheerful person with a fringe of brown curly hair lying like a halo of camel's wool above a chubby face. He looked a little younger than he really was. At the age of twenty he had been ranked as the second best squash player in England and (in the opinion of many) the greatest Racquets player in the world, but how he had attained to the responsible position of a sub-editor on the *Kite* was a bit of a mystery to his friends.

After several false starts, an editor with imagination had suggested that he turn his attention to crime. So Todd had turned placidly to crime and employing some of the finesse which had kept his opponents guessing on the court, had turned out to be a moderately successful reporter.

Todd was waiting up, principally, for a notice from the dramatic critic on the current first night.

There was a knock. It was a messenger.

"Two men for you, Mr. Todd."

"Two men?"

"One's a cabby, and the other—well, he's in a bit of a mess."

"Bring 'em up," said Todd.

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A few minutes later he was staring, in speechless astonishment, at Mr. Wetherall.

"I'm very sorry to bother you," croaked Mr. Wetherall, "but could you oblige me with the loan of ten shillings? I haven't enough on me to pay my fare."

"Your fare," echoed Todd faintly. "Were you thinking of going somewhere?"

"I'm going home."

"Yes. Of course. But look here, old boy, are you sure you want to go home in that state?—your wife—do sit down."

This was just in time. Mr. Wetherall's legs had hinged under him.

"What's the bill so far?"

"Three and ninepence," said the taxi-man, "and demmage to me upholstery."

"I expect it'll wash off," said Todd. "It's only blood."

"Suppose it will," said the taxi-driver. He was plainly divided between a desire to make some money out of the situation and fear of offending such a power for good and evil as a sub-editor of the *Kite*.

"Here's five bob," said Todd. "That should cover it. Put your name and licence number down on that bit of paper, and if there's a story in it I'll see you get a mention."

The taxi-man retired, and Todd got on the house telephone and asked for Mrs. Weaver.

"Could you bring some hot water and lint and sticking-plaster and that sort of thing?" he said. "No—not exactly a street accident, but something pretty like it. Yes, shock too, I should think."

The *Kite* was apparently used to tackling emergency first aid. Mrs. Weaver, a brisk woman, who had patched and bandaged her way through the Blitz, dressed Mr. Wetherall's multiple injuries. It was his right hand that caused her most concern.

"There's bones broken," she said. "He'll have to see a doctor over that."

"All right. But he's not dying?"

She sniffed disapprovingly.

"He ought to be in bed."

"It's no good sniffing," said Mr. Wetherall, with an irritability which showed that he was recovering. "I didn't drink that whisky. It was upset over me."

"If you say so," said Mrs. Weaver, gathering her first-aid kit together.

"Come in," said Todd. "Oh, here's the tea. Thank you, Brice. Just the thing for shock. Hot, weak, and sweet. I'm not sure I won't have a cup myself. Here you are."

Mr. Wetherall accepted it gratefully.

"Now," said Todd. He moved across and casually turned the key in the lock. "Now, don't you think you had better tell me something about it?"

"Yes," said Mr. Wetherall. "I really think I'd better do that."

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It was such a difficult story to tell. It had an end but no beginning. Or rather, when looked at closely, it had too many beginnings. Important things like Crowdy, the Donovan family, Jock's Pull-In for Carmen. Unimportant things too, like Luigi and their own missing food parcel from Major Francis. It was interrupted, once by the arrival of the expected first-night report and twice by queries from the Compositors' Room, but in the end it was done.

When he had heard it through, Todd went over to the cupboard and got out a special bottle of liqueur whisky, and out of it he poured, in silence, two careful tots, and handed one of them to Mr. Wetherall.

"Charge your glass," he said. "The toast is the small boy who thought it *such* fun fiddling with the detonator of the ten-thousand-pound bomb."

"It's as bad as that, is it?"

"Have you got the faintest idea what you're doing? No. I thought not. Well, how can I begin to explain? You're touching the edges—you're playing round the fringes—of almost the only really organized piece of nonsense in England. It's so big that it seems to be invisible to the naked eye. It hasn't even got a real name. In this street, where we know about most things a jump ahead of the British public, we just call it the Food Game. It's a growth. It's also an organization. It's big business. It's so big it's almost respectable."

"Oh," said Mr. Wetherall. He was holding his glass in his left hand, swirling the tacky liquid slowly round.

"I can't tell you how it works. It's like the British constitution. It's got no rules. You can only tell it's there by the results. And those you run into every day of your life.

"Have you ever wondered why the restaurant where you have your supper can serve you three rashers—three walloping thick rashers—of bacon, whilst your wife and you shared a thin rasher between you for breakfast? Or why there's a full sugar bowl on the table? To say nothing of the rows of expensive cakes and pastries in the window, all made of butter and sugar. Or where your favourite Soho restaurant gets the ingredients for that lovely Steak Toreador?"

"I'm not a great restaurant-goer," said Mr. Wetherall. "But—yes, I did wonder sometimes about the bacon."

"The answer is so simple that I can give it to you in one word. Redistribution. It used to be called black market, but that's a phrase that was misused so much in the first five or six years after the war that it lost most of its meaning—and anyway, this is more specialized. Redistribution.

"It's so simple. Think of a lorry hurtling down the Great North Road, with a dozen sides of bacon swinging in the back. That's about nine thousand bacon rations. If it gets to its destination, which is some absolutely reputable wholesaler, it will be split up amongst the retailers, who will sell it to you and your wife and nine thousand other citizens, and no one will make more than about a farthing a pound profit, because that's the way it's meant to work.

"But what actually happens? The driver stops for a snack.

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He and his mate get out. No doubt they remove the ignition key, or lock the cab, or take other sensible precautions. But what's all this? Before they are through their second cup of tea—Wirra! Wirra! Goblins about! The lorry has started up and driven itself away."

Todd broke off, then added in an unexpectedly serious voice, "You know, the thing I find really unpleasant about that bit is that although a lot of drivers who are robbed are innocent and unsuspecting victims, in other cases the lorry *may* have stopped at that particular time and place because a little envelope reached the driver at an accommodation address that morning with ten crisp pound notes and a few simple instructions inside.

"However that may be, the result is the same. Instead of coming into the shops the bacon is sold at its *real* price to half a dozen restaurant and club owners, who may themselves be essentially honest men, but have got their customers to satisfy, and can't afford to have bacon off their menu if the next-door chap has got it on his. Then you and your wife and other citizens go in and have a jolly good plateful of bacon at three or four shillings a helping and glad to get it. See?"

"Yes," said Mr. Wetherall.

"Multiply that instance by a few thousand, and you see how Redistribution works."

Todd helped himself to another cup of tea, long since cold.

"There's nothing particularly novel about it. The only new thing is that the idea is getting around in informed circles that the old business has come under some sort of central management. Just after the war it was fairly haphazard. That's why I called it a growth. In those days, if you were lucky enough to steal a dozen sides of bacon and get away with them, your troubles were only beginning. You had to find somewhere to store them—you couldn't keep them under the bed; and you had to look round for people to sell them to, with the risk that one of your customers might be a fool with more conscience than sense who would go to the police; and you had to get the right price for the stuff, and see that the money was really paid to you, as promised.

"Well, Redistribution deals with all that. Guaranteed markets, guaranteed prices. You sell to them. They deal with the Luigis of this world."

"They deal with the Luigis all right," said Mr. Wetherall absently.

"This isn't only generalization," said Todd. "It's got a moral as far as you're concerned."

"I'm glad it's got a moral." As long as he sat quite still his aches were just bearable.

"I can explain it most easily by asking you a question. Why did what happened to you tonight have to happen at all?"

"It seemed perfectly simple to me," said Mr. Wetherall.

"That's because you've got a simple mind. It isn't really straightforward. If you were bothering this crowd at the circumference, I

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refuse to believe that their methods would have been so direct or so drastic.

"They get lots of that sort of bother. Restaurant proprietor A complains that ditto B is getting stuff off the ration. A goes to the nearest policeman or food official and screams, 'Black Market.' The authorities, if they take A seriously, have B watched. Maybe they can't prove anything. *Then A notices that his own custom is mysteriously beginning to fall off.* If he's a wise man he takes the hint and drops his complaints against B. Or perhaps there's a retailer, C, who gets caught handling stolen food. That's easier still. C is cut out of the system altogether. He's no good to them. He's been found out. He can whistle for the stuff.

"But—and here's the point—A, B and C don't get beaten up in back streets. That sort of treatment is reserved for people who get rather nearer the centre."

"Then I must have been right on the hub," said Mr. Wetherall.

"Don't you believe it," said Todd cheerfully. "If they'd really wanted to see you off you wouldn't be sitting in front of this fire drinking whisky. You'd be in the casualty ward of the Middlesex Hospital with screens round you.

"All the same—you may have hit on something. It might be something to do with that boy—Crowdy. They seem to have slipped up over that. I suppose they'll be down at Woking watching him like hawks from now on—"

"They might," said Mr. Wetherall. "Always supposing they knew where he was."

"But I thought—"

"I told them the first thing that came into my head. I don't suppose there *is* a St. Christopher's Home at Woking. I made it all up."

Todd whistled softly. "The de'il you did! Well, that's quite a point, isn't it? You had them on the wrong foot there, all right."

He got up, picked up the ruler from the desk, and with it shaped a very delicate back-hand drop-shot up the left-hand wall of the room.

"But then again—supposing that Crowdy business was just a blind. Something they said to take your mind off the real object of the exercise. Supposing you went somewhere or saw someone or heard something tonight that you weren't ever intended to. Supposing you got behind the scenes and saw the strings moving—"

"Do you think it could have been that Scotsman?"

"Might have been. I should have thought it was more likely someone in that pub. After all, that was the name you were working on. Or that club. Or just one of the basement doors you happened to knock on. You seem to have thrashed around a good deal."

As well as an aching head allowed, Mr. Wetherall reflected.

"I don't think I was actually followed to Soho. I don't know. It's difficult to be sure—"

"There's no certainty about it. You'll have to wait until the police pull in those two toughs. That may tell us something."

"Until—"

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"If you give the police as good a description as you've just given me," said Todd, "it shouldn't be too difficult. There is only a limited number of professional bullies in London, and most of them are on the books."

"You think I ought to go to the police?"

"Not tonight," agreed Todd. "But the very first thing tomorrow morning, of course you must. You'll be putting yourself hopelessly in the wrong if you don't. You've got nothing to hide, have you? You're a law-abiding citizen. You've been assaulted. You inform the police, and sit back and wait for your assailants to be lined up for you to identify."

"All right. But if by 'sit back' you mean that I'm to stay out of this thing from now on, I'm afraid you've got it wrong. I certainly couldn't drop it now. To start with I don't approve of physical violence—"

"You don't—" Todd looked at his friend, and suppressed a desire to smile.

Mr. Wetherall was peering earnestly over his broken glasses, apparently unconscious of the fact that one side of his face was red and blue from forehead to chin; that his lip was split, that both hands were heavily bandaged, and that his suit was an unspeakable travesty of its once respectable self. "You don't," he said, "approve of violence?"

"I've always been against bullying, too. It's a thing I've been very strict about in any school I've taught in."

"Quite so," said Todd. "Well, all I'm suggesting is that just at the moment you ought to keep in the background a bit. You're a marked man now, and if there is any secret to be discovered in the Soho area, it won't be you who'll turn it up."

"What do you suggest?"

"I thought, just for a start, that perhaps I might hang around that pub in Soho. They can't assault *all* their customers."

"You're sure you won't get into trouble?" said Mr. Wetherall earnestly.

"That's all right," said Todd. "I'm not rugged, but I'm supple. I used to be reckoned one of the best dodgers in London. You're about all in," he added suddenly. "I'll get you a taxi. Or better still one of our reporters lives in your part of the world. I'll ask him to run you home. The sooner you're in bed the better."

"I expect you're right," said Mr. Wetherall.

An hour later, as Todd was preparing to pack up for what was left of the night, the house telephone rang. He listened for a few moments and said, "Have you any idea what the old boy wants?"

The voice at the other end had no idea.

Todd went out into the corridor, took the lift up three floors, and went through a swing door marked "Private." A stepping-up of the chromium, pressed rubber, and indirect lighting indicated that he was approaching a higher authority.

He went through another door, and a middle-aged woman who

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was sitting at a desk said, " Straight in, Mr. Todd, he's expecting you."

" Did you realize, Aurelia," said Todd, " — I only mention it in case no one has ever broken it to you before—that you sound exactly like the compère at a Roman circus, saying, ' *This way for the Lions* ' ? "

" That's your conscience," said the woman. " As a matter of fact, he's in rather good form."

Duncan Robarts was the greatest editor that the *Kite* had ever had ; at that time the brightest star in the night sky of Fleet Street. Yet " star " was hardly the word. Of heavenly bodies he most resembled a planet. There was no twinkle about him. He shone, with a steady, lowering power and lesser bodies moved in their orbits under his influence. His private intelligence system was remarkable, and he knew every least member of his staff, and liked them all. The moment he ceased to like them, they ceased to belong to his staff. It was as simple as that.

" Come in, Alastair," he said. " Sit down. Tell me, now, who was that man you salvaged ? "

Todd told him, as succinctly as he could.

" You were friends before, were you ? What sort of man is he ? "

Todd considered carefully before he answered.

" He's a likeable person," he said, " and remarkably adult for a schoolmaster. In ninety-nine situations out of a hundred I should say he would behave in the decent, woolly way that his class always do behave."

Robarts was small and thick, and he sat so hunched over his desk that he looked almost deformed.

" In the hundredth case," Todd went on, " if his blessed principles happened to be involved, and if he saw what he conceived to be a duty ahead of him, and if he got the bit between his teeth—well, I don't know of anyone with wrists strong enough to hold him."

Robarts swung his chair round suddenly, hopped out of it, and moved across to the fire.

" It's not quite our usual line, is it ? What are you planning about it ? "

" I don't know, sir. I thought of spending a little time on it myself, but I don't—"

" You think it's too big to tackle ? "

" I certainly think it's too big for Wetherall to tackle."

" Don't you be too sure of that," said Robarts. He had his hands behind his back and he flirted his coat-tail up and down like a sparrow in the spring. " The Liverpool race-gang got broken up before the war—but I don't need to tell you about that—"

" No indeed," said Todd, fingering a white scar on the side of his jaw.

"—because one stupid, obstinate, frightened little cockney bookmaker refused to play ball and got himself kicked to death behind the grand stand at Aintree. And the biggest racket in organized prostitution that this country has ever seen came to grief when one girl—one absolutely innocent girl—was arrested in Regent

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Street for soliciting and refused to back out by the easy exit that was offered to her—plead guilty and pay ten shillings—and stuck her toes in, in the face of every filthy threat that was made until—well, you know that story too."

"Yes," said Todd, "I know that story too."

Outside, a long way down, they could hear London coming to life. The lights were going out, and the wheels of day were beginning to turn.

Robarts walked back to his desk and sat down. "Don't get us officially involved unless I tell you," he said.

WEST END CENTRAL

When Mr. Wetherall crawled back to consciousness next morning he found that most of his resolution had drained away. His right hand was an aching lump. His head was opening and shutting in hellish rhythm, and the first thing he did on leaving his bed was to be sick. After this he felt a little better and put some coffee on, using his left hand. Then he shaved and (very slowly) dressed.

The only grain of comfort was that, since it was a Tuesday, he need not be at the school until after lunch. Apart from this, the difficulties loomed in successive and aspiring crests.

First, he must have his hand dressed and set at the hospital. Then he must see the police. Then he must get hold of some money. And send his suit to the cleaners. And think out what to say to his wife when she came back that evening.

On the hall mat he found a letter from Mr. Bullfyne, his literary agent. "I have had no luck so far," said Mr. Bullfyne, "in placing your short story, *The Chimes at Midnight*. I myself enjoyed it, and it was well written, but you might like to see the comments of the editor of *Home Detective*, which I enclose."

Mr. Wetherall said something uncharitable about the editor of *Home Detective*, but he had never yet had the strength of mind to throw away such an enclosure unopened.

"It seems to us," said the editor, "that although Rupert Fraser (the name under which Mr. Wetherall wrote) has talent, he seeks to describe scenes of which he can have no first-hand knowledge. If he would abandon his attempts to describe night-life, gangs and physical violence and would devote himself to those sides of life—"

"Tcha," said Mr. Wetherall.

Divisional Detective Inspector Clark inspected Mr. Wetherall with distaste.

"Where did this happen?" he asked.

"In a street off Dean Street, in Soho."

"When?"

"At about eleven o'clock last night."

"Then why wasn't it reported before?"

"I was in no condition to report it," said Mr. Wetherall, indicating his hand which, plastered and strapped at the hospital, lay like a whitewashed football on his lap.

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"May I ask what you were doing in Soho at eleven o'clock last night?"

"It doesn't seem to me to be entirely relevant, but if you must know, I'd been having a few drinks—at a public house."

"I see."

Inspector Clark managed to vest these simple words with such a bottomless depth of innuendo that Mr. Wetherall wriggled afresh on his chair.

"Were you alone?"

"I started the evening alone. I finished it in the company of a man who stated that he was a Scotsman. I understand that his name is actually Higgins, and he earns his living by entertaining queues in Leicester Square."

Inspector Clark was beyond comment. To gain time he wrote down Leicester Square on the corner of his blotting-pad. "Perhaps you could describe the men again—the ones who, you state, attacked you."

Mr. Wetherall described them again.

"Have you any idea why they should have attacked you?"

"Well, they took my wallet."

"Yes. Any other idea?"

Mr. Wetherall's mind stalled at this question, like a tired horse at a high fence. It had taken him an hour when he had talked about it to Todd the night before. How could he begin to explain it all over again to this large, angry person?

"I—yes—" he said. "I did think that there might have been other reasons, but they're rather complicated ones. I don't want to waste your time."

Inspector Clark sighed. The expression on his face was more eloquent than speech. If, said his expression, fools get muddled up in matters they don't understand, and if their warped minds invent tortuous reasons to explain their imbecile conduct, then it was his unhappy duty to listen to them. That was the sort of work he was paid for. The job for which he drew his inadequate salary.

No treatment could have been better calculated to provoke Mr. Wetherall's familiar spirit.

"Well," he said more cheerfully, "if you're really sure you've got time for it, I *will* tell you about it."

It proved easier a second time, and in ten minutes he had reproduced, with very few omissions, the story of his doings during the previous week.

Mr. Wetherall had not been instructing classes for twenty years for nothing, and one thing was apparent to him as he spoke. His audience might have started cold, but it was warming up. The interruptions became fewer and fewer and the Inspector's careful parade of indifference became more and more perfunctory. At the end he was listening with more than interest. There was an undercurrent of stronger feeling.

"So it seemed to me," Mr. Wetherall concluded. "Although

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there isn't any direct proof, I know—this part is really only guess-work—but it did seem possible that the men who assaulted me were—"

A curious thing occurred at this point. He had been intending to finish the sentence by saying "—were part of the crowd who run this food racket." Instead, at the last moment, and for no reason at all, he changed it, "—were part of the crowd who murdered Sergeant Donovan's wife."

If he had produced a hand-grenade, extracted the pin from it, and dropped it casually into the waste-paper-basket, the effect could hardly have been more remarkable.

Inspector Clark jumped to his feet, turned extremely red, glared down at Mr. Wetherall, opened his mouth as if to say something, shut it again, and sat down with an effort at self-mastery that was so obvious as to be almost ludicrous.

Then he said, in a choked voice, "Will you kindly leave Sergeant Donovan out of this?"

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Wetherall. "As a matter of fact, I didn't mean to mention Sergeant Donovan at all, but he happens to be a friend of mine—"

"I don't want to hear anything about Sergeant Donovan."

"Oh, all right," said Mr. Wetherall. "It was just a thought. Let's forget all about it, shall we?"

Before the Inspector could say anything further there was a knock on the door, and a Sergeant came in and put a note on the desk. The Inspector read the note, snorted, and said to Mr. Wetherall, "It looks as if we might have something for you soon. You said that one of those men called the other 'Sailor'?"

"Yes."

"You're sure of that?"

"Well, as sure as I could be in the circumstances. There was quite a lot going on."

The Inspector looked at him with distaste.

"You realize," he said, "that if we arrest these men yours is going to be almost the only evidence—"

"The waiter in that night club ought to be able to identify them—"

"He might identify two men who called for you. That won't prove that they were the ones who assaulted you—"

"No—" said Mr. Wetherall, doubtfully.

His head was aching, and he was disliking Inspector Clark more and more every moment. "There was a woman, too—"

"A prostitute?"

"Yes—well, I'm afraid she probably was, but she seemed a kind creature."

"I'm afraid her identification wouldn't carry very much weight."

"I wouldn't know," said Mr. Wetherall, suddenly feeling he had had enough. "Perhaps it would, and perhaps it wouldn't. But I can't help feeling that if you would concentrate a bit more on helping and a bit less on making difficulties, we should get on better—"

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"My duty is to assess the evidence, and see if there is a case on which we can act."

"Then assess it. Don't act as counsel for the defence."

"I don't think we need trouble you any more at the moment," said Inspector Clark, standing up.

He did not offer to shake hands. Mr. Wetherall fumed his way out into the street.

It was half past twelve and the sun was out. When he had recovered his equanimity it occurred to him that he might get some lunch before going back to school.

In spite of his aches his mind was tolerably clear, and as he sat at the café table, ladling soup into his mouth with a spoon held awkwardly in his left hand, he was working out a proposition.

Sergeant Donovan had been engaged in cases to do with food stealing. His wife had been attacked and (though possibly accidentally) killed. Sergeant Donovan hinted that he knew who was responsible, but he had not passed on the information to his superiors.

Now he, Wilfrid Wetherall, had almost certainly run into the same crowd—or a branch of the same crowd—and had got into trouble. Yet any suggestion that the two cases were connected was anathema to the police. Or was anathema to Inspector Clark—who might not be the highest court of appeal.

It did not make sense. And yet, in another way, it did.

"Cottage pie, mashed potatoes, anything that doesn't need cutting up," he said to the waitress.

"You hurt your hand?"

"It was trodden on by an elephant," said Mr. Wetherall. The girl rewarded him with a smile, and he suddenly felt better.

When he got back to school, Peggy was waiting for him.

"Well, you've done it this time," she announced.

"Done what?"

"Got 'em all talking about you."

"And just what," said Mr. Wetherall, "are they saying?"

"It goes by age groups. The younger ones say that you got lit up and took on three policemen outside the Wandsworth Tube. But Sammy won't have that—and he's got a lot of supporters."

"Sammy who?"

"My brother. He says you got your face caught in Tower Bridge when they were winding it up."

"I see."

"The bigger ones say you went on a spree in the West End and got beaten up by a gang in Soho."

"They do, do they?" said Mr. Wetherall thoughtfully.

The telephone rang.

"West End Central Police Station. Is that Mr. Wetherall?" said a woman's voice. "One moment please." Then a man's voice. "Superintendent Huth here, Mr. Wetherall. Could you come over here as quickly as possible, sir? I've got Inspector Clark with me. We have two men we hope you may be able to identify."

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"Yes—I think I could—"

"I'll send a car for you."

"All right," said Mr. Wetherall. "But for heaven's sake don't send it to the school, or you really will start something."

"I'll tell them to pick you up at the corner of the road," said Superintendent Huth.

The police had done their work well and fairly. The room seemed to be full of large men with reddish hair and open-air complexions and thinner men with white faces and black hair.

Despite the competition, Mr. Wetherall picked out the two men as soon as he came into the room, and he saw from their expressions that they knew him and knew that he had recognized them. The red-haired man looked indifferent. The young one had a calculating look in his eyes which Mr. Wetherall found disquieting.

"Just line up there," said Superintendent Huth. "Now, Mr. Wetherall. Would you have a good look at them all? Do you see anyone you know?"

"Yes," said Mr. Wetherall. He indicated the two men.

"You have seen these men before?"

"Yes."

"Where was that?"

"Well—last night—in—I can't remember the name of the street. In Soho. They are the two men who attacked me."

"You're quite sure?"

"Yes, quite sure. I saw them twice, once in the full light, and then in the street. I particularly noticed this one—" he pointed to the red-haired man—"had a tiny yellow spot in the iris of his left eye."

Superintendent Huth moved across and looked into the red-headed man's eye with the gravity of a West-End oculist. A police sergeant with a note-book wrote down, "The man identified had a yellow spot in his left eye," and looked gratified.

"And what about this one?"

Mr. Wetherall stared at the white-faced man, who stared back.

"Yes," he said. "There's nothing in particular about him, but he's the man all right."

"You're sure?"

"Oh, quite sure."

"All right," said Superintendent Huth. "The rest of you can go, and thank you very much. Would you come this way, Mr. Wetherall?"

He found himself in the Superintendent's office. The Superintendent had a shock of white hair and a hard but mobile face. Mr. Wetherall liked the look of him. At the moment he was sitting at his desk, with the tip of his tongue showing out of one corner of his mouth, writing. He wasn't being rude. It was just that he had a lot to do and the moment for Mr. Wetherall's further assistance had not yet come.

After a few minutes, Mr. Wetherall's curiosity got the better of him.

"Who are those men?" he asked.

Superintendent Huth withdrew his tongue, placed one broad

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forefinger on the paper as if to pin down the thought he had been interrupted in penning, and said, " Hired bullies. The big one's name is Whittaker. His friends call him Red. The thin one, I think, is Jackson. No one seems to know anything for certain about him except that he was in trouble during the war for trying to kick a Maltese stoker to death."

" A sailor ? "

" That's right. Sailor Jackson."

" And they work together ? "

" They and one or two others."

" Would a man called Guardsman be one of the others ? "

" Could be," said the Superintendent.

" And Prince ? "

" Which Prince ? "

" An ex-boxer, with one eye."

" Again, could be. He's in the same trade." The Superintendent looked, for a moment, as if he was going to go on writing. Then, instead, he laid his pen carefully in the pen-tray, tilted back his chair, and gave Mr. Wetherall a long stare.

" You seem to know a lot of these people," he said.

" Well, you see," said Mr. Wetherall, " I'm a schoolmaster. As a matter of fact, I used to teach Prince. He was a horrible little boy."

" He hasn't gone up hill since. Did you teach Guardsman too ? "

" No. I met him in a café called Jock's Pull-In, in my part of the world."

" Jock's Pull-In ? " said the Superintendent. He looked as if he was going to say something about it, but changed his mind. " I suppose you meet a lot of queer types in your job ? That's really the only difference between us. You get 'em young. We get 'em afterwards."

" Not all of them, I hope. By the way, what will happen about those two ? "

Again the Superintendent paused before answering. He was, thought Mr. Wetherall, being perfectly friendly but never for one instant coming off his guard. Possibly all policemen were like that.

" It depends what the others make of them," he said.

" The others ? "

" We haven't been able to find the woman, but there's a busker called Higgins, and we've got the doorman and the waiter from the Minstrel Boy."

" I see," said Mr. Wetherall. " That's quick work. They all saw the men in a good light. And they're not the sort of faces it's easy to forget."

" It's quite surprising," said the Superintendent, " what some people can forget if they give their mind to it."

At this moment the door opened and Inspector Clark came in. He walked straight over to the desk.

" No go, sir, I'm afraid."

" None of them ? "

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"None of them."

Both men turned and looked at Mr. Wetherall who went first hot, then cold.

"Do you mean," he said, "that Higgins and those two men from the club—that none of them recognizes those two men?"

"That's right," said Clark shortly.

"No," said the Superintendent. "Not quite." He got up from his chair and sat on the edge of his desk. "Mr. Wetherall said, 'None of them recognize the men.' That's not quite right."

The Inspector looked blank.

"None of them *admit* that they recognize them. That's more correct, isn't it?"

"Oh quite, sir. But it's all the same so far as we're concerned."

"It's impossible," said Mr. Wetherall. "There couldn't be the slightest question about it. That big one. Apart from anything else you can't suppose there are two men of just that size and complexion with a tiny yellow spot in his left eye—"

"No doubt," said Clark. "The pity is we shall have to say if we are asked that you didn't mention the yellow spot until you'd inspected the men at close quarters this afternoon."

"Do you believe me," said Mr. Wetherall, "or don't you?"

"It's not a question of believing. It's what we can prove to the Court."

"Then you prefer their story to mine?"

Inspector Clark sighed.

"It's not just your story," he said. "They've got alibis. The usual sort. Playing cards with friends. But you can't laugh them away altogether. All right. Perhaps a Court's going to prefer your word to theirs. But there's something more they're going to say. They're going to say you were so far under the influence of drink that you couldn't possibly have recognized anyone."

Mr. Wetherall swallowed hard.

Inspector Clark waited for comment, and then went on with a sort of patient reasonableness that Mr. Wetherall found more infuriating than bluster.

"Higgins agrees he had six or eight whiskies, and as you were meant to be standing level turns he's not likely to suggest you had less. And those night-club people say you were behaving queerly—banging ashtrays on tables—"

"That was Higgins."

"And there's a story about breaking a bedroom window in the house next door."

Mr. Wetherall sat still. He was angry. He felt angrier than he had ever felt in his life before, and he was trying to bring himself under control. If he lost his temper all was lost.

At last, when he was sure of his voice, he said.

"I asked you a question, Inspector, which you haven't yet answered. Do you believe me or not?"

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"Since you put it to me like that, I think you may have been mistaken."

"All right." He had himself in hand. "That's blunt anyway. Now I'm going to ask a favour."

"Yes?"

"I want a word with Higgins. If he denies these two men to my face, then I'll give it up. But I don't think he will. I don't think he can."

"I'm afraid—" began the Inspector heavily.

"Let him see Higgins," said Superintendent Huth. He had been sitting so quietly that both of them had forgotten him.

"I think he's gone, sir."

"Then send someone after him. You can use this room, Mr. Wetherall. I expect you'd like to see him alone."

But Higgins had not gone.

Seen in broad daylight, and some hours away from the whisky bottle, he was rather a pathetic figure. He seemed to have shrunk inside his clothes. Daylight and sobriety had reduced him to half of himself. It was like meeting one's favourite actor for the first time off stage.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Higgins."

"Good afternoon, sir. I don't think I ever caught your name."

"I was your cousin Hector last time we met."

"So you were, then. It was quite an evening, wasn't it?"

He seemed fascinated by the enormous bandage on Mr. Wetherall's right hand. His eyes kept swivelling round to it, and jerking away again, as if he realized that he might be drawn to a forbidden topic.

"Look here," said Mr. Wetherall abruptly, "why did you tell the Inspector you couldn't recognize those men?"

"I—hmp—" said Higgins. "Well—"

"You saw them perfectly clearly. You must have done. They broke down the door of that room at the club. They not only went through it, they came back again. You must have seen them twice."

"I was lying down. I wasn't feeling very well."

"You were on your feet when I came through."

"Then I must have laid down again."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Wetherall, in exactly the tone he had so often adopted with an obstinate boy. "You're not telling the truth."

"It's very confusing."

"It wouldn't be confusing if you stuck to the truth. What's wrong with you? Are you frightened?"

"Yes," said Higgins, sitting down suddenly on one of the hard chairs beside the desk. "I'm frightened."

Mr. Wetherall felt at a disadvantage.

It was no good saying, "Well, don't be frightened." The fact was there. It was evident in every line of Mr. Higgins' dropped face and huddled body. It was in his twitching mouth and in his eyes, where the whites showed startlingly, as in a horse that has been mishandled.

"It's easy for you," said Higgins suddenly. "You don't have to

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put up with it, like what I do. You've got a house of your own, with a front door, and if there's any trouble you get on the blower and send for the police. I'm not like that. I've just got a bed in a room in a house in Lauderdale Street. You could walk into it right now. There isn't even a lock on the door. And I work, nights, in Leicester Square, and if they wanted me they'd pick me off as easy as—as easy as knocking back a glass of beer, and think no more about it. You don't know them—"

"Oh, don't I?" said Mr. Wetherall.

"It isn't just knocking down and kicking. Have you seen that Jamaican that runs round with them? 'Pretty' they call him. Pretty! The other night he got in an argument, just over nothing, with another brown boy. And do you know what he did? I'm not telling you the tale—I was there—I saw it. He got out a knife—" Mr. Higgins gestured towards his own inner pocket—"Just like that—casual like—like you or me might take out a fountain pen and sign our names—and he cut an inch off the end of this boy's nose."

Mr. Wetherall scratched the end of his own nose thoughtfully, tried to laugh, and found himself clearing his throat instead.

"Did you tell the Inspector all this?" he said at last.

"Certainly not."

"And those night-club people. Are they the same? Is that why they won't talk?"

"It's worse for them. If they made any trouble their place'd get bust up."

There is something both disarming and flattering about a person who admits that he is afraid. It suggests, without precisely stating it, the corollary that you are not afraid yourself.

"Now you look here, sir," said Higgins, observing that Mr. Wetherall was weakening. "You leave those boys alone. They're not worth worrying about. Sooner or later the police'll catch 'em at it and run them all in."

"Well—" said Mr. Wetherall.

"You do that," said Higgins, "and I'll do something for you. It's something—" he held up a dirty hand and spread the fingers—"not that number of people in London know about. Keep your eye on that Annie. She's hot—"

"I didn't want you to go thinking I'm happy about this," said the Superintendent, as he said good-bye to Mr. Wetherall. "Some time back you asked Inspector Clark if he personally believed your story. You must never ask a policeman that. It isn't a fair question. What he thinks personally doesn't signify. All he's taught to look at is what sort of case he can put in Court next morning."

"All right," said Mr. Wetherall. He was tired of the whole thing. His head was aching again and he wanted to get home. "You may be right. I wouldn't know. I haven't had much to do with police before."

"That wasn't all I wanted to say." The Superintendent was still patient. "I wanted to tell you that if there was any more trouble, I'd like you to get in touch with me straight away. Either me or

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Scotland Yard. One of our people there has been handling these food cases for a long time. A lot of them start through me, because Soho's in my manor, but he gets them all in the end. Co-ordinating, you might say. The name's Hazlerigg. Chief Superintendent Hazlerigg. You might care to make a note of it."

TROUBLED WATERS

When Mr. Wetherall got home that Tuesday night he felt very tired; tireder than the night in 1939 when he had evacuated four hundred children on a special train to Leamington Spa (which was his previous standard of tiredness).

Since he could not conceal the state of his hands and face, he gave his wife a modified version of his adventures and fell asleep in the middle of her lecture on the folly of people who behaved like schoolboys the moment other people's backs were turned.

The next things of which he was clearly conscious were that the sun was shining, that judging from the angle of the sun, it was very late, and that he felt a lot better.

"I thought I'd let you have your sleep out," said his wife. "I telephoned that girl of yours and told her you'd be late."

"Splendid," said Mr. Wetherall. A real night's rest had put its blessed curtain down between him and what had gone before. "In that case, perhaps I might have a second slice of toast."

At the school he found Peggy in charge and everything running smoothly. If he had helped himself to a month's holiday and left the school in her hands he sometimes wondered if anyone would have known the difference.

"That horrible Clayton child," she said, "has come to school again with nits, and it's Nurse's Inspection Day tomorrow. I've locked him in the lavatory till he can be seen to. Here is the draft agenda for your School Board Committee on Friday—and—have you heard anything lately about Patsy?"

Mr. Wetherall was reading the agenda, which contained a new, and therefore suspicious, item, and he hardly heard the last question. Then, looking up, he saw the trouble in her eyes and said, "What's that, Peggy? What's wrong with Sergeant Donovan?"

"I just wondered if you'd heard anything."

"Not that I can remember. Why?"

"You've been seeing a lot of the police lately."

"I can't remember anything—no, wait a minute. There was something. When I was talking to Inspector Clark I happened to mention his name, and the Inspector looked as if he was going to blow up. What's Patsy been doing?"

"I wish I knew. He won't tell us anything, Mr. Wetherall. He just sits at home. He hardly goes out at all."

"He must go on duty."

"That's just it. He doesn't. I think he's been chucked out."

"Chucked out?"

"Suspended. Something like that. There's an inquiry on."

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"Oh dear." Forebodings came rushing back. "When did it happen?"

"Whatever it was, it was this week-end. He ought to have gone to the Station Monday afternoon and he didn't. Inspector Clark was round to see him that morning, and then he didn't go. He's been sitting there ever since, like a bear with a sore head. If only he'd tell someone about it—" Peggy's sigh comprehended woman's entire view on the stupidity of man— "we might do something to help."

"It may be nothing to do with—all this other stuff," said Mr. Wetherall. "There's no reason it should be connected. It may be something quite different."

But he did not say it very hopefully.

When he got home, the first thing his wife said was, "He's moved."

His mind was full of Sergeant Donovan, and he stared at her.

"I felt him this morning. Just after you'd left the house. He gave a little kick."

"Good heavens!" said Mr. Wetherall.

"There's a letter from Major Francis," added Mrs. Wetherall. "Such a nice letter. He wishes we could all go on a visit to him. His daughter's had a *second* child."

Mr. Wetherall read the letter, and when he had finished it he folded it up and put it in his wallet.

Anyone who did not know him might have supposed that the episode was closed.

His bruises were fading. His hand, though still out of action, was comfortable. The medical attention had been paid for by the State, though there was still a cleaner's and a tailor's bill, perhaps a couple of pounds, which would have to come out of his pocket.

Most men would have accepted Superintendent Huth's verdict and would have written the thing off to experience. "To one beating-up of moderate severity—forty shillings."

Not Mr. Wetherall.

At twelve o'clock on the following day, the Thursday, he took a bus over Waterloo Bridge and got off it at the Aldwych. Then he walked past the Law Courts and Temple Bar, into Fleet Street.

It was not the offices of the *Kite* he wanted, because he turned out of Fleet Street into one of the old seventeenth-century courts which have remained almost unchanged since the boy Pepys lived there with his father, the tailor, and went to church at St. Bride's. Successive blocks of offices have grown up round them, but have not destroyed them. Rather they have preserved them, as pliocene and oligocene growths might encrust and protect a genuine jurassic deposit.

In Hoopmakers Court, up two break-neck flights of stairs, lay the office of Messrs. Bertram and Moule, Solicitors and Commissioners for Oaths, whose sole surviving partner, Mr. Bertram, was Mr. Wetherall's man of law.

The office of Bertram and Moule was arranged with a simplicity which itself reflected a bygone age. It consisted of an outer room,

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an inner room, and a passage. The passage was so full of black boxes that it was impassable, but since it led nowhere this hardly signified.

In the outer room, at a high desk, sat a young man who typed and dispatched the letters, drew up and delivered the bills, kept the accounts, answered the telephone, and brewed the tea.

In the inner room Mr. Bertram practised the Law.

He looked like a gangster. Not the big one, with the machine-gun, but the small, cheerful one who holds open the door of the big shot's car.

He listened, in silence and without visible surprise, to Mr. Wetherall's story. Occasionally he closed his eyes. They were his most remarkable feature, set deep in his head, behind countless protecting folds, involute and overlapping as the petals of a rose; and in the middle, when you had lost your way among the bordering ridges and creases, like the treasure at the heart of the labyrinth, a pair of remarkably bright grey eyes.

"What are you going to do?" he said at last.

"Really," said Mr. Wetherall, "that's what I've come to ask you."

"I thought you might have some general idea. Do you want to have a go at the police for failure to do their duty?"

"Oh, no. That wasn't my idea at all. I just thought that if the police wouldn't prosecute these men, I could."

"Technically, yes. On the other hand it wouldn't be easy if the police were against you. But there would be nothing to prevent you starting a Civil Action against them."

"Then let's do that."

Mr. Bertram cogitated.

"It would be unusual," he said. "We'd have to serve them personally with the writ. I suppose it could be done. If you got a Court to believe you, you might even get awarded damages. They wouldn't be easy to collect. Have they got any property?"

"A lot more than I have, I should think. They all go round in silk shirts with gold cigarette-cases—"

"That wasn't quite the type of property I had in mind," said Mr. Bertram. "It would be a matter of delicacy to levy a distress against either of the articles you mention. Incidentally, do you know their names and addresses?"

"One is called Whittaker. Red Whittaker."

"Is Red his Christian name?"

"Really," said Mr. Wetherall irritably, "I don't know. That's the trouble with you lawyers. You do nothing but make difficulties. Do you mean to tell me that a man can come up to me in the street and assault me, and I can do nothing about it?"

"If the person who assaults you is a respectable citizen, with a proper name and address, there is, of course, a great deal you can do about it. If he is a person of the—ah—lower, or criminal, class, your remedies are less accessible."

"Well, I expect you know," said Mr. Wetherall wearily. "It seems so monstrous and illogical that I'm prepared to believe it's correct."

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When he got home that evening he found a letter from Alastair Todd waiting for him. It was a short letter, with a bulky enclosure, which turned out to be a sort of report. There was nothing to indicate to whom it was addressed, and it started without preamble.

"The Double Four is an odd set-up. The Saloon Bar is quite a normal sort of place, I thought. The only really remarkable thing about it is the whisky, which is Scotch, all branded types, and the supply unlimited. After a bit of hinting I was even able to buy a bottle to take away. Price forty-five bob. I half thought it would turn out to be vinegar and water, but it wasn't. No, sir.

The barmaid in the Saloon Bar is called Ethel, and she's rather a honey. At the moment she's my cover story for visiting the place so often, but if things go on as they are I shall soon be promoting her to the front page.

The Private Bar really is *private*. There's no fancy-diddle about this. If you go in you're turned out.

Annie, the proprietress (-trix)—I'm coming to her in a moment—shoved her head round the partition and said, quite politely, 'Not in there, sir, if you don't mind. Plenty of room in the Saloon. We keep that one for club members.' Grossly illegal of course, though I fancy it's done in quite a lot of these back-street pubs, only not often so openly.

Well, there it is. If we're looking for the headquarters of a gang, this could be it. I should have thought it was a trifle public for the hatching of schemes and the disposal of swag. Particularly if we're looking for a food-stealing racket. You could no doubt slip a bundle of pound notes over the counter as you paid for your drinks, but not a side of bacon.

I've had four sessions in there so far. Lunch and evening on Tuesday and lunch and evening on Wednesday. No one seems to find such persistence surprising. Why should they? I'd go there for the whisky alone. With Ethel thrown in, it's a walk over.

Last night was my most successful to date (I'm not talking about Ethel now. My eye's back on the job.) It's not possible to see into the Private Bar direct, but I got wedged up at one end of the Saloon Bar and there was one of those looking-glass advertisement-contraptions on the shelf that gave me a bit of a view. It was too messed up with gilt lettering to be much use, but I got occasional glimpses, and round about nine o'clock I saw a big, red-faced, red-haired man who looked as if he could have been one of your pals. Circumstances didn't permit of spotting spots in eyes, but I think it was him all right. He had a younger, black-haired type with him, and that seemed to match up, too."

Mr. Wetherall discovered, at this point, that his left hand was shaking, and he put the paper down for a moment. "Must be getting tired," he said. But it wasn't that. In a sudden flash of pure intuition he had realised that the black-haired young man was the one who had broken up old Mr. Crowdy, as he lay beside the track. A pick

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helve or a spade, Sergeant Donovan had said. He snatched the paper up angrily and went on reading.

" My view wasn't good enough for me to see what they were up to. They left about ten o'clock. I toyed with the idea of following them, but decided that it wasn't the moment for heroics. It was lucky, in a way, that I didn't because I managed to get some gen about Annie that I might otherwise have missed.

Annie is some girl. I don't know when I've met anyone quite like her. She's not what I should call easy to get on with. Her appearance is a bit off-putting and she's got an insulting way of listening to all you have to say and then topping it off with a perfunctory laugh as if you were a child trying to amuse her with conjuring tricks. In fact, I believe I only really heard her laugh once (that was at a joke I should hesitate to repeat in any company) and it was a most extraordinary noise—like a marble coming out of the top of a full ginger-beer bottle.

But she's certainly all there, and she rules that pub like a dictator. The only weakness I am able to detect in her is that she seems to be a soft touch for patent medicines. By means of the same useful looking-glass I caught sight of her private medicine store kept underneath the bar. From the glimpse I got of it, it was crammed with every sort of mixture and tonic and buck-you-up-oh that's ever been sold at nine hundred per cent profit to a gullible public. Some enterprising firm must be making a fortune out of her.

However, as I was saying, just before closing-time last night, I got into conversation with an old man. It might be more accurate to say that he got into conversation with me. He was as tight as a tick, and had obviously reached the stage where he had to tell somebody something. I just happened to be nearest, so he grabbed me. In the course of a twenty-minute monologue I never got as far as finding out his name or anything much about him, but I did gather that he was deeply in love with Annie, and that Annie would have nothing to do with him. Dispassionately, I couldn't blame her. He was a seedy old boy, with a long alcoholic history written in his face.

' She's cold,' he said, grabbing me by the sleeve, and breathing into my face a blast of mustard pickle, whisky, and senile decay. ' Cold as a nice-berg. Not seckshually cold, old man—I don't mean seckshually. Temperamentarally. Cold as a nice-berg.' Did I know, he went on, why her closest friends called her Icebox Annie ?

' Because she's cold as a nice-berg,' I guessed.

' No, no. Not at all. It's a story,' he said.

And a story it was. Even now I don't know if I believe it (but the mere fact that people *do* believe it describes her better than I can).

It appears that once, in the early days of the Hitler war, Annie had a husband. She got tired of him, so she ' stretched him with a

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bottle.' No doubt many a wife has done as much before—and then screeched until the neighbours or the police rolled up. Not so Annie. Being in the catering profession provided her with certain amenities not enjoyed by ordinary folk. She was the owner of several outsize refrigerators, into one of which she pushed her better half. Thereafter, being amongst her other accomplishments a good rough butcher, she cut him up into very small parcels indeed, which she deposited, from time to time, in the swill bins set up at each street corner by a thrifty government. At the end of three or four weeks she had only the larger bones left, and these she parcelled up and dropped off the middle of Hungerford Bridge.

The whole thing was, thought the boys, an extremely neat job, with the right professional touch. It seems to have raised her no end in their estimation—though it's noticeable that no one has since actually volunteered for her hand."

Mr. Wetherall folded up the three or four sheets of typescript. The one he was reading was a carbon copy. It did occur to him to wonder who had the top copy.

CHEZ DONOVAN

When Mr. Wetherall arrived at the school next morning he was surprised to find that Peggy was not there.

In all his experience of her this had happened only once before, when she had scalded her hand helping with the week-end wash, and the chaos during the seven days she had been away was something he liked to forget.

He sent for Sammy, and found that he was absent too. There was no time to do any more about this. He went into morning school with vague misgivings.

There were one or two things worrying him besides the absence of the Donovans. However, there was nothing he could do about that. They had no telephone and he was tied to the school all day.

At half past six that evening, when he was reaching for his hat and coat, he heard footsteps along the corridor and the red head of Sammy Donovan appeared in the gloom.

He was glistening with excitement.

"Oh, Mr. Wetherall!"

"Where have you been all day? And where is Peggy?"

"She's home."

"What's wrong with you all?"

"Nothing's wrong," said Sammy. He sounded important, complacent and excited. "We can't move out till after dark. Even after dark's not easy."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"It's Patsy. You heard what he did?"

"I heard something."

"You know you tipped him off about Jock's Cafe and Pop Maunder."

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"Jock's Pull-In for Carmen," said Mr. Wetherall slowly. "Yes, I believe I did say something. What about it?"

"Patsy went round and busted Pop up—to make him sing."

"Sing?"

"Talk. He bounced him up and down on his head till he talked. He can get very mean, these days, Patsy."

"Yes," said Mr. Wetherall. He thought of Sergeant Donovan as he had last seen him. "Yes, but why—?"

"He got slung out of the police for it. Well, he's not actually slung yet, but he's going to be."

"What has all this got to do with not being able to go out?"

"The boys'd do him if he went out, Mr. Wetherall."

"Then why don't they come in and get him?"

"They couldn't do that. There's a lot of Irish in our street, and they like Patsy, see."

"I see," said Mr. Wetherall. He tried to think dispassionately. "What do you want me to do?"

"Patsy wants you to come and see him."

Mr. Wetherall hesitated.

"It's quite safe," added Sammy tactlessly. "I'll show you the way."

"I wasn't thinking about that," said Mr. Wetherall. "If the truth were known I expect there's nothing to prevent us walking up to the front door—or Patsy walking out, for that matter."

"He tried it yesterday. Got fed up with sitting in the house and slipped out for a drink. There was three of them waiting for him at the end of the road."

"What did he do?"

"He ran," said Sammy, with a gap-toothed grin. "Patsy don't often run, but he ran this time."

"All right," said Mr. Wetherall. "If he really wants me, I'll come."

It was a curious journey. Immediately after crossing the Walworth Road they turned into the forecourt of a big block of Council flats, and walked across it, to the blind end, where one of the iron railings was missing. After squeezing through, they crossed what looked like a builder's yard, climbed a low wall, crossed another yard and so came up against a further row of spiked railings. Again, one of these proved to be loose. Mr. Wetherall got the impression that he was moving along a well-used highway.

The next obstacle was a line of back-garden walls which ran up to, but did not quite meet, a higher blank wall behind them.

"We gotter squeeze here," whispered Sammy apologetically.

They squeezed for about fifty yards. The gap grew narrower and narrower. Mr. Wetherall was about to protest when he found himself out in the open again.

"We gotter climb here."

The first step was a dustbin top, the next a ledge, and then the guttering along the top of a row of garages. Mr. Wetherall was beyond caring.

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They creaked across a flat garage roof, lowered themselves onto the corresponding ledge on the other side, and dropped to earth.

"Our back garden," said Sammy. "Mind the chrysanthemums."

In the kitchen the Donovans were assembled.

Mrs. Donovan was a smaller, plumper version of Peggy. Her hair was grey, but she had the same steady eyes. When she spoke Mr. Wetherall realized that, like all the best families, the Donovan family was a matriarchy. And whilst the younger Donovans spoke pure cockney, there still lingered, at the rear of Mrs. Donovan's speech, a faint lilting tone. It was nothing that could be expressed in phonetics. It was as indefinite as an echo and it was a reminder that she had not always belonged to those dark streets, but had been born within sound of the surf on the west coast of Ireland.

"I'm pleased to see you, Mr. Wetherall," she said. "I hope the boy has not been too rough with you. Go and brush your trousers, now, Sammy." Sammy muttered but obeyed. "It was my idea you should come here. I told Patsy he ought to speak before anything happens."

"Before anything *else* happens," said Peggy.

The person who had not spoken so far was Sergeant Donovan. He was sitting at the head of the table, in the same disquieting attitude of repose. He looked up and said, "You heard I got into trouble."

"Sam started to tell me."

"It was Maunder. He gave me some back-talk, see. Mentioned Doris. Then I hit him."

"Did you hurt him?"

"Yes." Sergeant Donovan looked surprised. "Yes. I hurt the little bastard right enough."

"Tell Mr. Wetherall what he said to you afterwards."

"When I'd finished with him he started talking. He hadn't got no more tick left in him than a busted clock. So he told me things—about his end of the racket. He didn't know a lot, but he told me all he did know."

"And have you passed it on?"

"No one's asked me yet. Next thing I knew, old Clark was round here, telling me I'd been suspended. You could've knocked me down."

It was the speed of the thing that had surprised Mr. Wetherall too. He was not surprised that Patsy should have got into trouble. Sooner or later, in any police force, a policeman who bounced suspects on their heads would be likely to be looking for another job. It was the speed with which Sergeant Donovan's mouth had been shut that he found astonishing.

"Tell Mr. Wetherall what Pop told you," commanded Mrs. Donovan.

"You know he runs a cafe, Mr. Wetherall, for rail men and transport drivers."

"Yes, I've been there."

"There's a yard at the back for parking lorries. You seen that? All right. Now say you're a railway worker who's got a van-load of

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hot stuff. Two or three cases of tinned butter or ham, or a crate of poultry, or whatever you like. You drive into Pop's parking place—better, perhaps, to wait till it's dark, but you could do it by day if you had to—and you park your lorry with its back up against Pop's back door, and you go in and sit down at one of the tables Pop serves himself.

"When he comes to take your order you tell him what you got for sale and fix a price. Two cases of butter, say, at five pounds a case. No one's to tell what's happening. You might be arguing over the prices on the menu or the result of the 3.30. And that's all there is to it."

"That's all?"

"When the driver goes out to pick up his lorry, two cases of butter are gone from the back, and there's ten pounds in notes under the driver's seat."

"I see," said Mr. Wetherall. It seemed simple and fairly fool-proof. He thought back to his visit to the café. It could have been going on all round him. He would have been no wiser.

"Where does the stuff go then?"

"Into Pop's store-room for a day or two. Then the boys come and collect it."

"Red and Sailor and Guardsman and the rest?"

"That's right. Your boy-friends. They run two or three lorries of their own. Quite legitimate. My guess—it's only a guess—is they run the stuff up Central somewhere and store it."

Sergeant Donovan leaned back in his chair. "And I'll tell you something else, Mr. Wetherall," he said. "As soon as the police shut down one joint they open another. The word gets round—"

"Then as I see it, the people who are essential to the running of the thing are Red and his crew."

"They're just a heap of muck," said Sergeant Donovan. "If you got rid of them tomorrow there'd be another lot doing it the next day. There's no shortage of muck in this town, if you're prepared to pay the rates for dirt."

"Yes. But this happens to be the particular heap of muck that is doing the work at the moment."

"That's right."

"Who are they working for?"

"If I knew that," said Sergeant Donovan, and the gust of his anger blew him to his feet, "if I knew that I shouldn't be arsing round here wasting—" He caught a look from his mother. "I'm sorry, sir," he said. "It's got me down."

"That's all right. I really wanted to know. Is there any sort of lead up from this crowd to the man above them? If I follow what you said, these men collect the stuff and dump it somewhere, and distribute it to the Luigis and others. And they collect the money from them, and get tough with them when it's necessary. But unless they're the people actually running it—"

"They haven't got enough brains to run a fried-fish shop."

"Then they must pass the money on—less their cut—to someone

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else. Perhaps they don't all know who it is, but *someone* must know what the arrangements are."

"They may know. They won't talk."

"Guardsman might talk," suggested Mrs. Donovan softly.

There was silence in the little kitchen. A draught from the window was swinging the unshaded electric light bulb and chasing the shadows across Sergeant Donovan's scarred face.

"He's had a two-stretch," went on the old lady. "He'll collect a handful next time."

"Something in that," said Sergeant Donovan. He sat down as abruptly as he had got up. "Mother means that if Guardsman was actually took, on the job, he might talk to save his skin. He's had a full prison sentence already. It'd be five years penal servitude next time he was caught."

"Caught doing what?"

Sergeant Donovan thought seriously about this.

"Assaulting the police," he suggested at last with a smile.

Ten minutes later Mr. Wetherall was back in the Walworth Road. Sammy who had escorted him, brushed him down, and said, "If you want any help, Mr. Wetherall, don't forget me."

"All right," said Mr. Wetherall, and he meant it. It had gradually become plain to him that he was involved in a business where an academic brain might be less use than courage and red hair.

SITUATION VACANT

On the following morning Mr. Wetherall paid two visits in the Fleet Street area.

The first was to a twenty-four-hour café in St. Columbus Street much used by newspaper men. At two in the morning it was usually crowded but was emptyish at more conventional times. Here, at a scrubbed wooden table in the corner, he found Todd. Five minutes' talk brought Todd up to date. Mr. Wetherall poured it all out, in no sort of sequence—the failure of the identity parade, the conversation with his solicitor, the trouble over Sergeant Donovan—and Todd sat, stirring his coffee, his head tilted, his eyes bright.

For no particular reason, it was one of the pictures that was to remain in Mr. Wetherall's mind when more significant matters had faded.

"You think it all hangs together."

"Of course it does. It's the technique. If you'd listened you'd have heard me telling you about it the other night."

Mr. Wetherall was on the point of asking for further explanations when another thought distracted him.

"Any luck with Annie?"

"Annie?" Todd moved back to the present with an effort. "Why, yes. I think I've solved Annie. It was an exercise in empirical logic. Like a crossword puzzle. Your first three answers are guesses. The fourth fits them all, and locks the thing together. First a fact about which there's no doubt. All 'the boys' use the Private Bar at the Double Four. It's a sort of thugs' clubhouse.

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"Last night I spotted little 'Pretty', the Jamaican, a sweet boy with the nicest smile. Second thing is this. You remember me saying I didn't think it'd be a good place for handling stolen food and drink. Correct conclusion, wrong premise. They don't handle food. All they hand over to Annie is money. She's cashier and paymaster." Mr. Wetherall nodded. Since he had had his talk with Sergeant Donovan he had been working the thing out for himself, and that was how he saw it must go.

"I take it they've got a central warehouse of some sort," he said. "They take the food and drink there by lorry from the collection points—places like Jock's Café, I mean—and they distribute it from there to the restaurants. That's right, isn't it?"

"That's right. The people who are really running the show never touch the stolen stuff at all. They just get the money."

"You mean the boys pay it over the counter to Annie—what does she do with it? Take it to Mr. X, the next man up?"

"I had an idea about that, too," said Todd. "Remember, Annie's no fool. And it's absolutely essential that the link between her and Mr. X shouldn't be spotted. She wouldn't just package up the pound notes and send them off openly to him. She'd want some sort of cover. Well, she's got one ready made. It's the sort of stupid thing that's so damned obvious no one sees it at all. It's that patent-medicine merchant. What would be easier? Everyone knows about Annie and her patent medicines. She writes to him quite openly. She sends him money from time to time. I expect it's the sort of firm that gives you money back on the bottles. That would be another excuse for sending off packages."

"It could be," said Mr. Wetherall. "There's nothing to show either way. And it still isn't going to be easy to prove."

"If it had been easy," said Todd, "it wouldn't have been right. This isn't an easy league we're playing in."

"Who is the medicine man?"

"It's a company. Hollomans Cures Ltd. Somewhere off the North Pentonville Road."

"Hollomans. I'm sure I've heard the name."

"They advertise a lot."

"I wasn't thinking of advertisements," said Mr. Wetherall. He was folding back his copy of the *Kite*. "It was in the Jobs Column, I thought I'd seen the name somewhere. I cut these out for my boys if they look promising. I'm pretty certain—yes, there you are. And it was in yesterday, too."

"Smart Boy wanted," said the advertisement. "General dispensing, packing, and clerical work. Salary by arrangement. Prospects. Apply General Manager, Hollomans Cures Ltd., 5 Strudwick Road, N. Only written applications will be considered."

Mr. Wetherall and Todd looked at each other.

"It's certainly an opening," said Todd. "Had you anyone particular in mind?"

"Sergeant Donovan's brother, Sammy. He's a smart child, with eyes in the back of his head. And one blessing, we shan't

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have to explain it all to him. He knows most of it already."

"Yes, that sounds all right."

"The next thing is to make sure of landing the job."

"Keep his price low enough and fake up some good references."

As they got up to leave, Todd said, "You're sure Sammy's got his wits about him?"

"He's a sensible boy," said Mr. Wetherall. "A good boxer at his weight, and as sharp as they come. After all, it isn't as if we wanted him to do anything very startling. Just to keep his eyes open and see if he can spot any funny business. Why?"

"A sudden attack of goose-flesh," said Todd.

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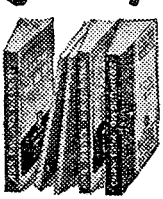

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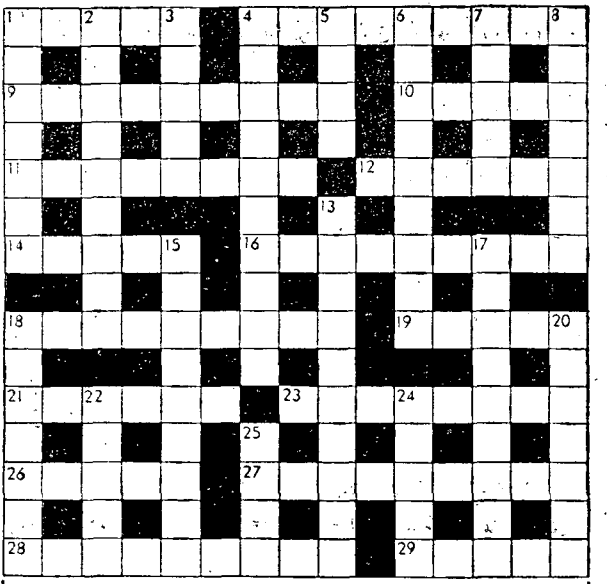

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CUT ALONG THIS LINE

CLUES

Across

1 A very great poet—and Derby winner 1 (5).

4 No suggestion that the Fleet's lopsided (4, 5).

9 For whom the bull tolled (4, 5).

10 Our No. 1 Academician opens the foreign art gallery (5).

11 Altogether it ends in a cathedral town (8).

12 Her man for a desperate battle (6).

14 It was abounding to Bunyan (5).

16 One of the Queen's Beasts, turned traitor, causes an insurrection (9).

18 Astronomer, astrologer or plain film fan (4–5).

19 He starts with nothing and ends with an unsightly mark, but he's much sought after (5).

21 Reformer on the way to a seaside resort—sounds cheerful (6).

23 Shelter behind these when it's raining cats and dogs! (8).

26 "The short and simple ——s of the poor" (Gray) (5).

27 "And —— darkness buries all" (Pope) (9).

28 The deer is deprived to provide a restorative (9).

29 It is not to be disputed and one's own is always good (5).

Down

1 Shade of blue unlikely to be popular with cricketers (4, 3).

2 O! A tannic mixture may be derived from this plant (9).

3 "It is the very —— of the moon; She comes more near the earth than she was wont" (Shakespeare) (6).

4 An aristocratic award? (5, 5).

5 First planted by Noah, it now hunts in Hampshire (4).

6 Peel Rollo for Don Giovanni's servant (9).

7 Sounds destructive, to cut clothes in the Elizabethan style (5).

8 A chilly fellow, but easily softened (7).

13 A Welsh mouth and what you might put in it to make up a deficiency (10).

15 Munitions produced in the poultry-yard (9).

17 How trousers are pressed? (9).

18 The best day to be born, according to the rhyme (7).

20 Revel so as to make a firm intention (7).

22 A useful circle, but not the bull's eye (5).

24 Alter itself to be on the qui vive (5).

25 Proud as her bird (4).

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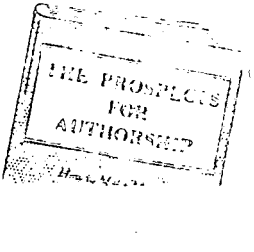

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